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PREVIEWED

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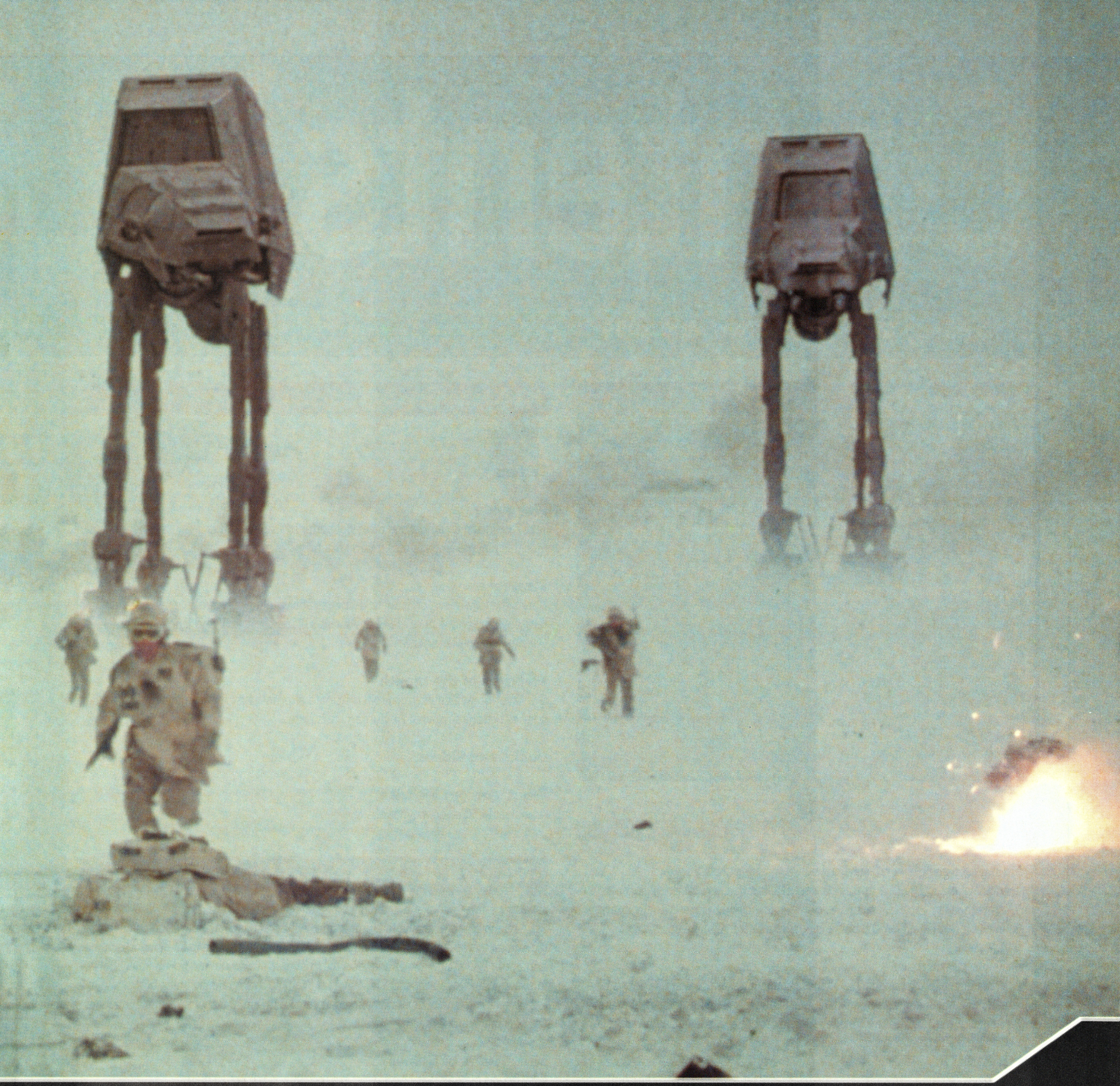

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This month's CD is full of the latest PCSG gaming goodies. We've got fully playable demos of Delta Force II, Age of Wonders, Settlers III: Quest of the Amazons and Theocracy. Once you've gorged on these, you can turn to our selection of rolling demos, including The Sims, Tiberian Sun: Firestorm and Planescape Torment, for a little after dinner treat. Naturally, we've also got all the latest patches and essential utilities available for your delectation.

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May 2000
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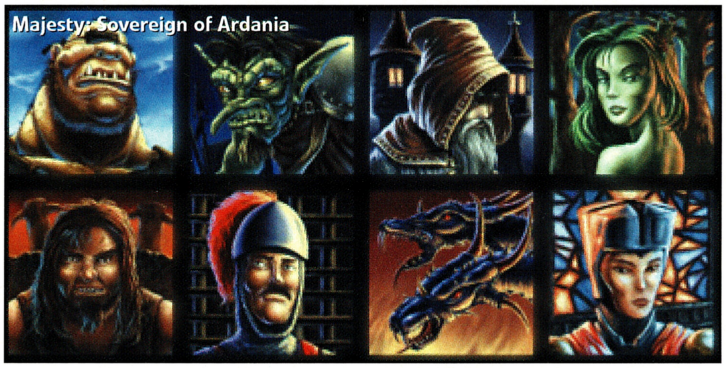
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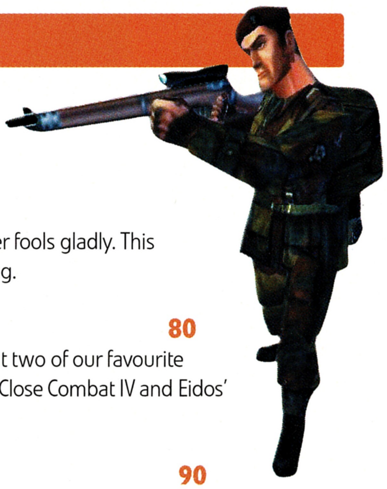

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Dr Richard Bartle is the man who created online gaming, some say – and that was 20 years ago. So what's he been up to since? It's a tale of suicide, sex change, broken wills and broken promises... but with a happy ending.

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Age of Wonders

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Ubisoft's latest RTS plunges us into South America circa 1419. It gives us human sacrifice, magic, vast land battles, strategic and tactical level gameplay, all wrapped up with Aztecs and Conquistadors. On first impression, it smacks heavily of AoEII, but it seems to offer greater depth and more flexibility through the incorporation of the magic elements. We're also told the AI is impressive and perhaps even definitive. We check it out.

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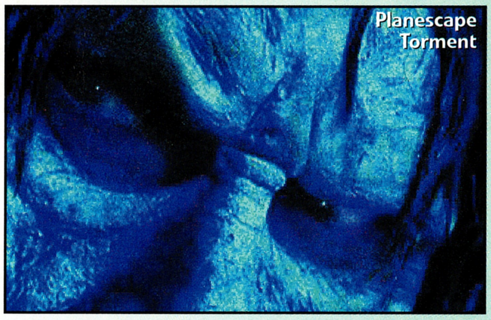
The game everybody's talking about. It's become a media cause celebre. It appears Will Wright, the creator of SimCity, has taken his particular brand of non-linear, non-goal oriented game design to unprecedented heights with this one. But is it a game? Does it involve a coherent strategy? PCSG gets down with The Sims to find out. Choose a PC, choose The Sims , choose A-Life!

SWAT Close Quarters Battle 50

It's a Squad-based tactical shooter set on the mean streets of LA. Take command of your SWAT team and ensure that a rogues' gallery of current American bogeymen (militia types, Middle Easterners and kooky home-grown terrorists) don't gatecrash the signing of an extremely important nuclear disarmament treaty. This may very well be the game that manages to outthink and outshoot Rogue Spear.

Planescape Torment 56

Black Isle, those lovely people who revitalised the RPG with Baldur's Gate, have brought us Planescape Torment. It's an unconventional RPG based in the AD&D Planescape Multiverse. The emphasis is very firmly on character interaction, with tried and tested RPG tactics such as hack and slay relegated to the back seat. But will it have us dusting off our 'Bags of Holding' and reaching for our trusty broadswords again?



Age of Wonders 64

Take 2's Age of Wonders is an interesting fantasy/strategy confection. It seems to combine elements of Red Orb's Warlords series, 3DO's Heroes of Might and Magic and Microprose's Master of Magic. It's got a nice isometric top down viewpoint, different combat modes, individual hero quests and the usual fantasy bestiary. Can it come out on top in this difficult and demanding gaming sub-genre?

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Mike Siggins laments the fact that, these days, games developers seem less inclined to let us, the gaming public, under the skin of their creations to play them as we want to. He's sick of shelling out his hard-earned cash only to discover that, due to some piffling consideration like lack of hand-eye co-ordination or general silliness, he can't progress past the intro screen... Why are some games just too darned hard to finish?

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14 NORTHFIELDS LONDON SW18 1UU
Tel: 0208 875 5600 Fax: 0208 875 5601

EDITORIAL
Editor: Martin Croft
martinc@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Staff Writers: Barry Ryan
barryr@crimsonpublishing.co.uk; Damon Wilson
damonw@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Editorial Assistant: Mark Shaw
marks@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Contributors: Kristen Bowditch, Ian Delaney,
Alan Emrich, Mike Siggins

DESIGN & PRODUCTION
Director of Design and Production: Mark Edwards
marke@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Art Editor: Howard Malone
howardm@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Designer: Andy Prior
andyp@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Production Co-ordinator: Shé Blake
sheb@crimsonpublishing.co.uk

PUBLISHING & MARKETING
Publisher: David Lester
davidl@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Marketing Manager: Roshan Osborne
roshano@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Circulation Co-ordinator: Derah McCall
derahm@crimsonpublishing.co.uk

ADVERTISING
Director of Sales: Mike Mikunda
mikem@crimsonpublishing.co.uk

TECHNICAL
Head of IT: Neal Sumsion
neils@crimsonpublishing.co.uk
Website Programming: Austin Parsons
austinp@crimsonpublishing.co.uk

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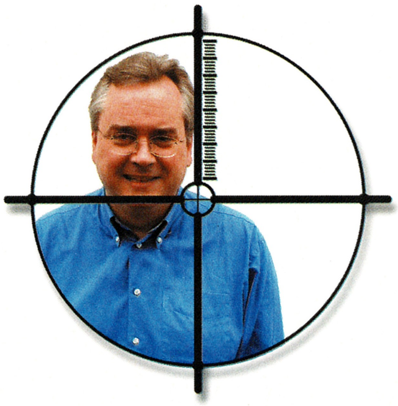


BRIDGE THAT GULF BETWEEN GAME DEVELOPERS AND GAME MARKETERS

Online games are the wave of the future – at least, that's what the games gurus are telling us. But I'm always a bit sceptical when people tell me that 'xyz is the technology of tomorrow' – usually, it turns out to be about as successful as Betamax, the Sinclair C5 or Lymeswold cheese (don't ask). However, when the subject of this month's profile, Dr Richard Bartle, says that online gaming is due to take off, then I'm prepared to believe him: because he's the man that many people in the computer industry credit with having created online gaming (though he doesn't necessarily agree).

You probably won't have heard of Richard Bartle: but you should have done. You see, 20 years ago, Bartle, along with fellow University of Essex computer science student Roy Trubshaw, developed the world's first MUD – Multi User Dungeon. And it was Bartle who believed in the commercial possibilities of MUD, got together with a backer to form a company to market it, Multi User Entertainment or MUSE, and licensed the fruits of that collaboration, MUD 1, to Compuserve in 1985 (where it was eventually was given the snappier name British Legends).

That game was finally taken off (for no good reason) at the end of 1999, making it the longest running multi-user computer game – so far. It's ironic that just as the games industry appears to be finally getting its act together when it comes to multiplayer gaming, the grand-daddy of all multi-user online games should be unceremoniously pulled, although Bartle says some of the game's fans are working on a new version.

MUD 1's biggest problem is that it was and still is a text-based adventure; after all, computer gaming in the early '80s, when it was originally developed, was dominated by text-based adventures. Show the gamer of today a text-based adventure, and you're likely to get some pretty blank looks. Let's face it, even though the rapid expansion of the Internet has meant that computer users have had to learn to read all over again, we have become perhaps too reliant on using the mouse and icons to communicate with our games.

Yet even though there were no snazzy graphics and no bells and whistles (in terms of music and sound effects), and despite the worst efforts of various companies which demanded licenses to run the game and then did nothing to promote it, MUD attracted a loyal – even fanatical – following which even now refuses to let the game die.

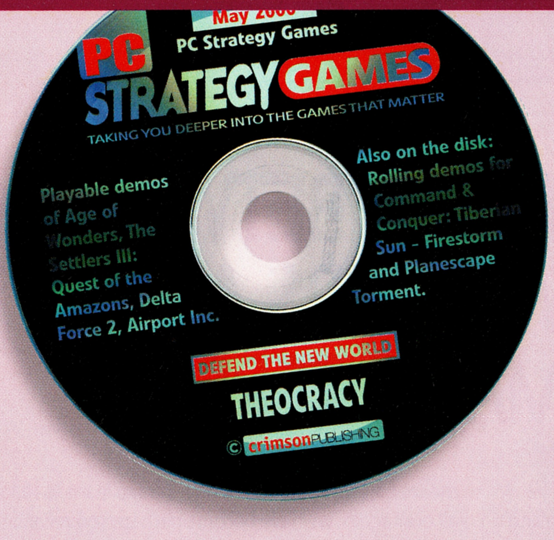
And that's the whole point about online games, Bartle argues. It's the people playing the game who make it or break it.

It doesn't matter how 'good' the game is, either in terms of the world setting, game engine, graphics, playability, speed of connection or service provider. If it doesn't get a core of dedicated gamers playing it, it will never succeed. And anyone designing an online game must always have at the forefront of their mind the need to create an online community, right from the start. That may sound really obvious, and certainly there are people in the industry who are aware of it, because the upcoming Game Developers Conference is full of lectures and workshops about how to build online communities. But there's a vast gulf in understanding between the people who actually write the games we play, and the people who are in charge of marketing them to us.

Martin Croft
Editor
martinc@crimsonpublishing.co.uk

What's on the CD?

This month, build kingdoms in South America, explore fantastic lands, or neutralise terrorists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Playable demos of Age of Wonders, The Settlers III: Quest of the Amazons, Delta Force 2, Airport Inc.
Also on the disk: Rolling demos for Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun - Firestorm and Planescape Torment.
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Playable demos

Delta Force 2

Minimum Specs: Pentium II
64Mb RAM, 165Mb Hard Disk Space,
Quad speed CD-ROM,
SVGA video card

Novalogic's follow up to the excellent Delta Force is now upon us. Check it out for yourself with this fully playable demo. Delta Force 2 has much to recommend it. Vast outdoor arenas, some rather tasty weapons (it elevates sniping to an art form) and lots of evil doers to smite from on high. The demo has also got four multiplayer options, including capture the flag and deathmatch. Anyone who's played the original will know that it's in multi-player that Delta Force really shines and this latest offering is no exception.

Age of Wonders

Minimum Specs: Pentium 166MHz
32Mb RAM, 350Mb Hard Disk Space
Quad speed CD-ROM,
2MB video card

Take 2's Age of Wonders takes a lot of its cues from Red Orb's Cult Warlord series. Age of Wonders ups the ante, though, by having a considerably improved graphics engine and some nicely implemented tweaks and innovations. It's set in a traditional fantasy gamescape, replete with all the usual fantasy beasties. You'll be able to create and recruit heroes who will lead your minions to victory and consolidate your empire. The game takes a while to get to grips with, but will reward any time invested in spades. If you like the Warlords series, you will absolutely love this.

Settlers III: Quest of the Amazons

Minimum Specs: Pentium 100MHz
32Mb RAM, 200Mb Hard Disk Space,
Double speed CD-ROM,
2MB video card

This add-on for the popular Settlers III parachutes a whole new race into the mix. What's more, they're female and this expansion has allegedly been created by popular demand, from players who wished to experience the unique thrills and spills of commanding a race of elite warrior females. None of that takes away from the fact that this represents a considerable enhancement to Settlers III and should go a long way towards revitalising the game's appeal. Give it a whirl – you won't be disappointed.

Theocracy

Minimum Specs: Pentium 200MHz
32Mb RAM, 200Mb Hard Disk Space
10x CD-ROM, 1MB video card

Ubisoft's latest offering, Theocracy promises to be the game that Age of Empires II should have been. It's set in South America

Vital Utilities

DirectX 7 The latest version of Microsoft essential graphics drivers.

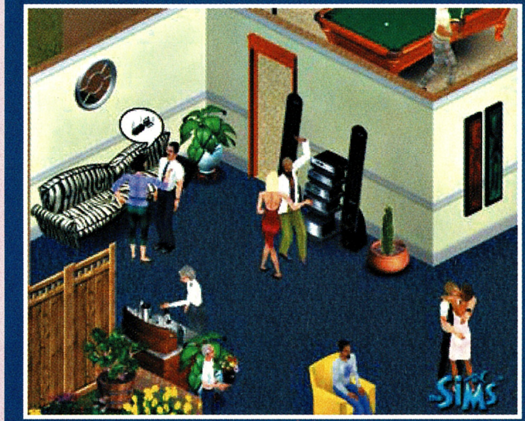
Winzip 7 The premier archiving tool (for contracting and expanding program files).

Paint shop Pro 6 An excellent budget art package.

Adobe Acrobat Necessary for reading some online game manuals.

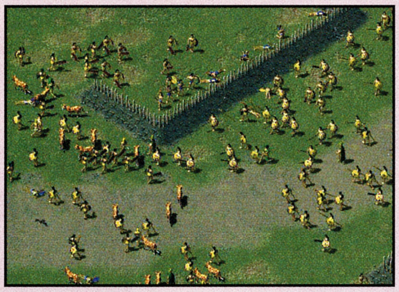
Hypersnap Allows you to take screenshots, even in games which sport DirectX/Direct3D or 3DFX modes.

The Sims - rolling demo



Minimum Specs: Pentium 233MHz, 32Mb RAM, 300Mb Hard Disk Space, Quad speed CD-ROM, 2MB video card

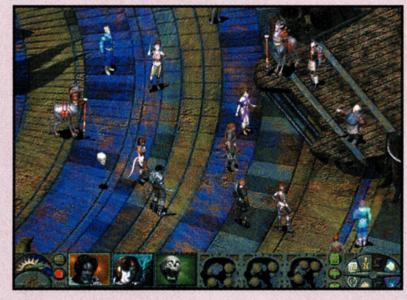
The game everyone's talking about. It's a people simulation from the genius who brought us the shockingly addictive SimCity. If you can't see why shepherding a group of Sims through their daily lives could represent a compelling gameplay experience, we suggest you give this rolling demo a whirl. Enjoy the god-like power of determining your Sims' lives – then watch in horror as they defy you in strange, bewildering ways. You should be warned, though: exposure to this game can seriously damage your social life.



in the 1200's. You command a fledgling Aztec empire which you must lead to a position of unassailable hegemony. It's a vast sprawling game, which allows you to micromanage all aspects of your personal fiefdom. There's also some extremely nice touches, such as the ability to sacrifice your peasants to your (extremely violent and blood thirsty) gods in a bid to obtain magical powers and appease them. It looks wonderful and plays like a dream.

Planescape Torment rolling demo

Minimum Specs: Pentium 200MHz 32Mb RAM, Quad speed CD-ROM, 4MB video card



Interplay's Planescape Torment should need no introduction at this point. It's one of the best RPGs to come our way in recent times. It takes an unorthodox approach to the RPG, though, concentrating far more on the cerebral than on the physical. The city of Sigil, where you start the game, will prove a harsh place for those who try to triumph by the sword alone: instead, you'll have to use those diplomatic skills and your native intelligence to solve the various riddles and find out who you are and why you're there. Apparently, this has given some of our more dyed in the wool role-playing brethren pause for thought. Take a look at this rolling demo, revel in the HR Giger-esque landscapes, and prepare to be converted.

Tiberian Sun: Firestorm – rolling demo

Minimum Specs: Pentium 200 MMX, 32Mb RAM, 100Mb Hard Disk Space, Quad speed CD-ROM, 2MB video card

The massively successful sequel to Command & Conquer, Tiberian Sun, is at last about to receive an expansion pack of its very own. Tiberian Sun: Firestorm promises all the usual gubbins, including new maps, new campaigns and new units. We know an awful lot of you C&C and Tib Sun fans will be frothing at the mouth in anticipation of this one, so we've taken the liberty of including a rolling demo on this months CD to give you a little sneaky peek.

Patches on the CD

SWAT Close Quarters Battle 1.2
A handy patch that tweaks AI and gameplay, and also incorporates a FAQ to answer any other queries you may have.

Cutthroats 6.0
Fixes a number of bugs, reduces the number of crashes and even improves game performance with certain system configurations – check the FAQ for details.

Championship Manager 99/00 3.71
Sports Interactive, the developer, claims that this brand new patch fixes all the known problems with the game. And who are we to argue?

Planescape Torment 1.1
Once installed, unnecessary disk-swaps should become a thing of the past with this sizeable patch. Several other bugs have been fixed and a whole host of gameplay features have been significantly altered. There are several spoilers in the FAQ, however, so don't read it too closely!

Rollercoaster Tycoon 1.08.183
A small (but perfectly formed) patch that deals with a few crash bugs in this highly recommended management sim.

Rollercoaster Tycoon: Added Attractions 1.01.021
An even smaller (but still perfectly formed) patch that again deals with crash bugs that have affected this recommended add-on pack.

Delta Force 2 1.04.26
Continuing their dedication to online support, NovaWorld have developed this multiplayer patch which enables players to participate in a new type of game, Search and Destroy, via the NovaWorld servers. Check out www.novaworld.com for schedules of forthcoming tournaments.

King of Dragon Pass 1.2
Corrects several bugs and typographical errors, improves advice and adjusts difficulty levels.

Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast 1.3.5512
Interplay's latest patch (a massive 6 MB) provides numerous bug and AI fixes.

Napoleon 1813 1.1.1
While other patches are in development, this one improves enemy AI (making them more flexible and more aggressive), alters battle mechanics and logic (altering unit values) and fixes most of the major crash bugs.

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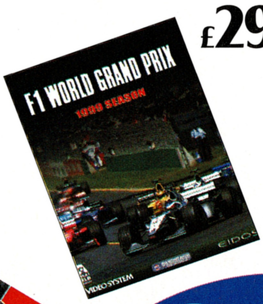

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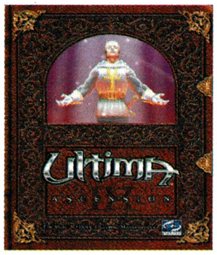

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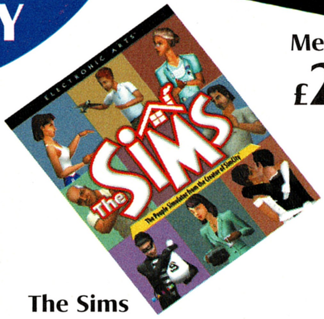

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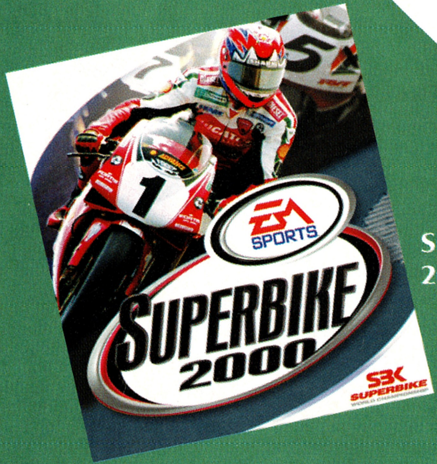

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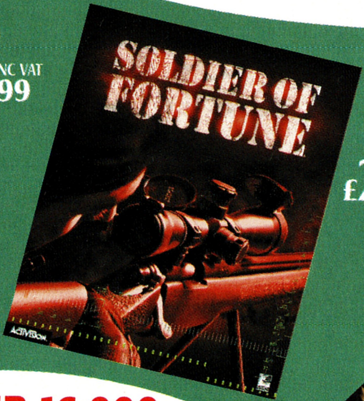

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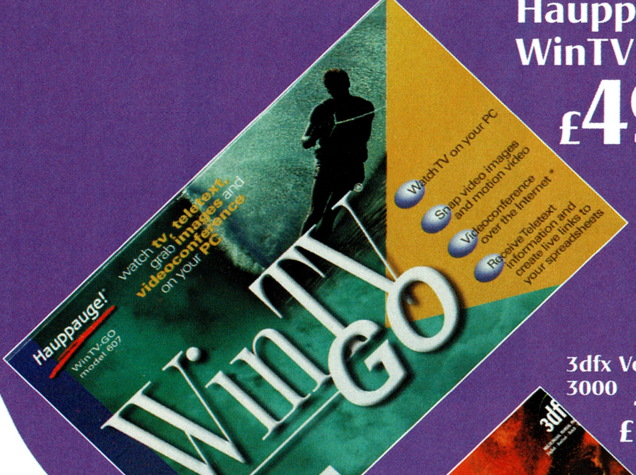

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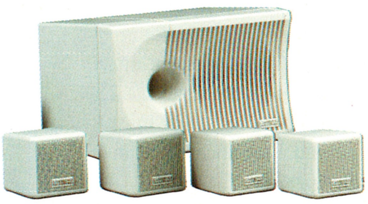

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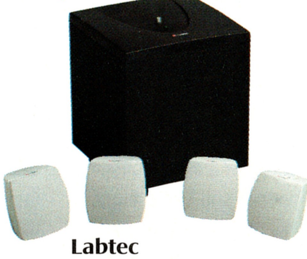

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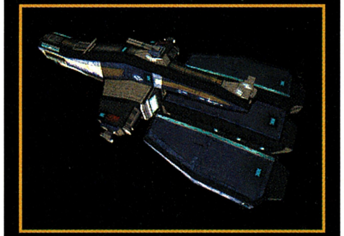
GAMES DIGEST



RED STORM Entertainment has revealed plans to double its games output for 2000. As well as an add-on pack for Rogue Spear, Covert Operations, programming is continuing on UFS Vanguard, a new tactical space combat game. Players have to protect the benign Allied Cultures against the power-hungry Hierarchy of Man, seek out new life forms and explore strange planets. Although combat will play an important role in saving the Universe, exploration and diplomacy will also need to be mastered. As well as a non-linear single player version, co-operative and competitive modes are available in the multiplayer game. Release date should be August.

GAMEPLAY.COM, the UK online retailer, has just bought the online gaming division of German publishing company Computec Media, which owns UK games software industry trade magazine MCV. The deal gives Computec £12m in cash and a £38m stake in Gameplay. Gameplay wants to build a pan-European online presence.

ELECTRONIC ARTS is buying game maker Dreamworks Interactive. Under the terms of the agreement, Dreamworks Interactive will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of Electronic Arts while continuing to produce titles related to Dreamworks SKG properties. The company, originally founded as joint venture between Dreamworks SKG and Microsoft, has been publishing with EA for the past two years. Financial details of the sale were not disclosed.

Talonsoft unleash Dogs of War

Another game which blends action, RTS and 3D graphics is on the horizon from an unexpected source – Talonsoft, which is increasingly shaking off its reputation as a hard-core wargame publisher under new owner Take 2. The game – Dogs of War – has been created by US developer Silicon Dreams.

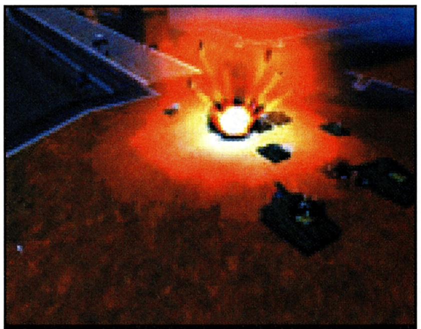
Dogs of War was previously announced under the less flattering title War Monkeys. It bears a superficial resemblance to Sierra's forthcoming Ground Control, in that both games abandon the resource management side of games such as Command & Conquer to focus solely upon the management of tactical combat.

The developers say the game is not an RTS in the traditional sense; instead, they claim to have created a whole new genre of game which they have dubbed 'Action Tactical'.

The story is set some 150 years into the future: the planet Primus IV has become a keystone in Earth's economy, as it is the sole source of a valuable mineral, a derivative of silicon known as SL18.

But now a three cornered war is developing between the Mantai, the indigenous species of the planet, the Primus IV colonists, who have declared independence from Earth and hired the War Monkeys, an alien mercenary force, to assist them, and Earth's Government forces.

Players can play as either colonists or Earth forces, controlling huge numbers of race-specific units (35 types in all) in the battle for control of the planet across several different terrain types. Although a pre-planning stage is included, players can and must take control of individual units in-mission.



Above: Players must control units

Since units gain experience over time, they must be protected; as their rank increases, their capabilities and ability to influence the outcome increases accordingly.

High-spec machines, however, will probably be necessary to do justice to the graphics that the developers are promising to deliver and to avoid slowdown when the screen is awash with action. Take 2 claims, however, that the engine is sufficiently powerful to accomplish this on all but the lowest spec machines.

Included in the game are 25 single-player missions, and up to eight different players can participate in multiplayer games with all the normal online support options present and correct.

It is understood that the engine used in Dogs of War will also be applied to another game upcoming from Talonsoft, Operational Art of War III.

How Talonsoft's old guard of hardcore hex-based wargame fans (the first two OpArt games were very firmly of that persuasion) will respond is unclear. In last month's issue, we reported on the departure of a number of senior Talonsoft producers, who have now joined Breakaway Games, the developer responsible for Sid Meier's Antietam for Firaxis. It is possible that Take 2's desire to take Talonsoft more mass market played a significant role in their departure.

Dogs of War is currently undergoing extensive playtesting and AI improvements, and should be released later in the summer.

Civ 2 co-creator Reynolds quits Firaxis

Brian Reynolds, the man credited with much of the game development on Sid Meier's Civilization 2, has quit Firaxis, the company he co-founded with Sid Meier after the duo left Microprose.

Reynolds apparently quit in December, but a Firaxis source says that because of protracted negotiations over his departure, it was not possible to announce the news until this February.

Only a month ago, Firaxis was still saying that Reynolds would be in charge of the development process for Civilization 3, which the company is working on for Hasbro Interactive, which now owns Microprose, and that he was also closely involved with the Dinosaur strategy game planned for release through EA.

Reasons for Reynolds' leaving have not been revealed, although it is believed that the split was mutual and amicable. Nonetheless, his departure is a blow to the company, especially in the light of the deal that was recently struck with Microsoft regarding the use of the Civilisation name.

Perhaps to reassure Civ fans, Firaxis has started to put information about the progress of Civ 3 on its website at www.firaxis.com/civ3. The latest news is that the game is "in heavy prototyping mode at this point, working out many of the new game concepts and features".

Firaxis says that many of the units, Wonders, and cultures from earlier Civ games will feature in the new version, alongside new ones developed just for Civ 3. The graphics are being made from scratch with a brand new engine, optimized for the game.

Sega announces million player online resource management strategy game

SegaSoft is to launch 10Six, a massively multi-player fully 3D online resource management strategy game that the company claims can handle up to one million players simultaneously.

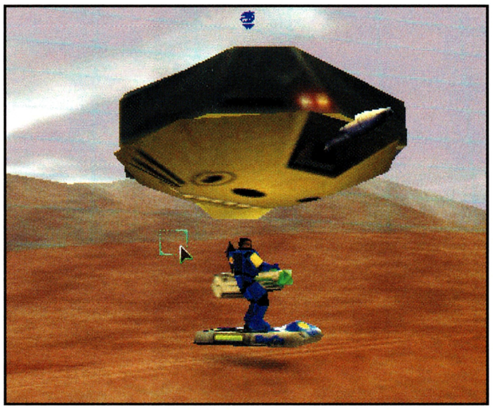
The world of 10Six is divided into a million plots of virtual land. Once a player has been granted the rights to one of these plots, it can be mined for its mineral wealth. That wealth can then be used to fortify the territory against claim jumpers, or buy units to go on the offensive with and capture as many plots from other players as possible.

As with classic RTS games, resource management is a key factor, but so is diplomacy. Alliances not only can be formed, but must be formed if players are to survive, because when they are offline, their territories are undefended.

The idea is that this game mechanism will actively encourage players to band together to form mutual defence leagues - although there will always be the possibility of treachery.

The 10Six world should continue to grow and expand; SegaSoft plans to add exclusive items (known as LEDOs - Limited Edition Digital Objects) to keep the game fresh. These new inventory or weapon items can be used to improve bases or traded for other LEDOs.

Interested online gaming fans can find out more at www.10six.com.



STRATEGY GAMES: Forthcoming Releases

All release dates are subject to change; none is guaranteed.

MARCH

Battlezone 2 Pandemic / Activision
Business Tycoon Stardock / Ubisoft
Empire of the Ants Microids
Heroes of Might & Magic 8 MicroProse
Grand Prix World Microprose / Hasbro Interactive
Icewind Dale Black Isle
Imperium Galactica 2 Digital Reality / GT Interactive
Majesty: Sovereign of Ardania Cyberlore / Hasbro Interactive
Player Manager 2000 Anco
The Settlers III Gold Edition Blue Byte
Theocracy Ubisoft
Tzar: The Burden Of The Crown Haemimont / Zablac Entertainment
Wall Street Tycoon Lumis / UbiSoft

APRIL

10Six SegaSoft (online)
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun - FireStorm Westwood / EA
Dark Reign 2 Pandemic Studios / Activision
Ground Control Massive / Sierra
Metal Fatigue Psygnosis / GT Interactive
Iron Strategy Nikita
Shadow Watch Red Storm Entertainment
Star Trek: Armada Activision
Star Wars: Force Commander LucasArts / Activision
Stars Supernova Mare Crisium / Empire
Submarine Titans Ellipse Studios
Sudden Strike CDV
Terminus Vicarious Visions
UEFA Manager 2000 Bubball Systems / Infogrames

MAY

Allegiance Microsoft (online)
B-17 Flying Fortress: The Mighty Eighth Wayward / Hasbro Interactive
Conquest: Frontier Wars Digital Anvil / Microsoft
Destroyer Command SSi / Mindscape
Earth 2150 TopWare Interactive / Mattel Media
Evolva Computer Artworks / Virgin Interactive
Fading Suns: Noble Armada Ripcord Games
Reach for the Stars Mindscape / Mattel Media
Shogun: Total War Electronic Arts
Starlancer Digital Anvil + Warthog / Microsoft
Wargames: Retribution Interactive Studios / MGM Interactive

JUNE

Age of Empires II: Expansion Pack Ensemble / Microsoft
Kingdom Under Fire Phantagram / GOD
Rogue Spear: Covert Operations Red Storm Entertainment
Tachyon: Beyond the Fringe Novalogic
Warhammer 40 000: Agents of Death Mirage Media
Dogs of War Silicon Dreams / Talonsoft
X - Com: Alliance Microprose / Hasbro Interactive

AUGUST

SWAT 3: Battle Plans Sierra
Homeworld: Cataclysm Relic / Sierra
U.F.S. Vanguard Red Storm Entertainment

3RD QUARTER

Arabian Nights Cryo Interactive
Battle Isle IV Cauldron / Blue Byte
Civil War Generals III Impressions / Sierra
Chessmaster 8000 Mindscape
Harpoon 4 SSi / Mindscape
Panzer General Assault II: Eastern Front SSi / Mindscape
Silent Hunter II SSi / Mindscape
Starship Troopers Blue Tongue / Hasbro Interactive
(Untitled) Pyro / Eidos Interactive
Warlords Battlecry SSI / Mindscape
Warzone 2120 Eidos Interactive

4TH QUARTER

Alien Breed: Conflict Team 17
Black and White Lionhead / Electronic Arts
Close Combat V Atomic / Mindscape
Commandos 2 Pyro Studios / Eidos Interactive
Economic War 2000 Monte Cristo Multimedia
Freelancer Digital Anvil / Microsoft
Gangsters 2 Eidos Interactive
Giants Planet Moon / Interplay
Harn: Bloodline Auran / Electronic Arts
Monopoly Tycoon Deep Red / Hasbro Interactive
Napoloen: Empire Builder Talonsoft / Take 2 Interactive
Republic: The Revolution Elixir / Eidos Interactive
The Settlers IV Blue Byte
Warcraft III Blizzard / Sierra
X-Com Alliance MicroProse / Hasbro

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in the above table, it is intended for guidance only. Games are subject to delay and cancellation, and all release dates, titles and publisher and developer information are subject to change. PCSG claims no responsibility for any inaccuracies that may later come to light.

Creature Labs turns beastly

UK developer Creature Labs is currently working on Beasts, a game where players will control tribes of Yeti. This is Creature Labs' first foray into the burgeoning RTS genre, and will utilise its in-house Artificial Life technology (as used in the million-selling Creatures franchise).

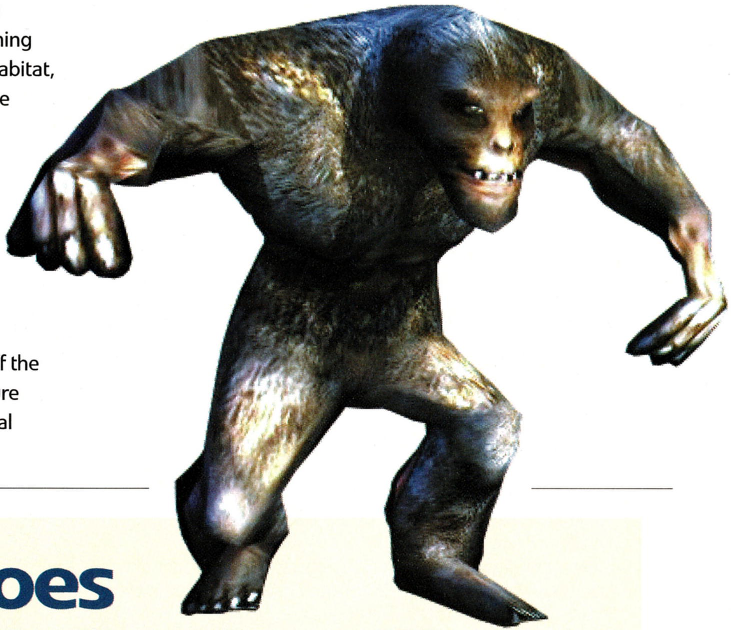
Players take control of a group of Yeti in multiple 3D environments, guiding them from the brink of extinction to safety. The main challenge is posed by man and his ruthless exploitation of the environment – local mining operations are slowly poisoning the Yeti's natural habitat, and it's up to the Abominable Snowmen to scare the company away by foul means or fair.

The complexity of the AI system means that release is not anticipated until the summer of 2001. The Yeti themselves will think and act on their own initiative within a detailed social hierarchy. Creature Labs says that they will learn, grow old and eventually die.

Although a number of quest-based single player missions must be successfully completed to fend off the threat of environmental disaster, players must ensure longevity and prosperity for the tribe during the vital management phases. The ecosystem and the social structure of the tribe (the player must also control yeti mating habits... nice) changes over time, forcing the player to adapt correspondingly.

Multiplayer fans will be able to participate in head-to-head, co-operative and death-match games. An open-ended option is also likely to be included. SimYeti, perhaps, or Yetiz?

Check www.creaturelabs.com for further information.



Blue Byte goes for Gold with Settlers III

To celebrate the success of The Settlers III (over 700,000 copies of the explore and exploit game have been sold worldwide), German games publisher Blue Byte is to release a Gold version of the game. The new pack, as released in Europe, will include a version of the original game (with gameplay slightly tweaked to improve playability), the Mission pack and a number of exclusive add-ons. In the US, it will have a different name and slightly different contents.

As well as 70 additional maps designed by fans and Blue Byte workshop members alike, the Quest of the Amazons expansion pack will also be included. This expansion features 10 new single player and 10 new multiplayer maps, as well as two new campaigns comprising 12 missions each. New buildings, landscapes and a character type – the thief – are included, and players will have the chance to play as an all female race, the Amazons, for the first time.

Blue Byte says that the addition of the Amazons follows overwhelming demand from female games players, who wanted to control a race they could identify with more.

A comprehensive list of strategies, new skins for online play and a couple of teasing AVI's are included. Sequel-loving Blue Byte is also giving gamers a first glimpse of two major titles to be released later in the year, The Settlers IV and Battle Isle IV.

Blue Byte has major plans for growing its share of the British marketplace – its sales are still strongest in Germany and France – and so has appointed David Bayliss, previously sales manager with Cosmi, as its UK sales director.

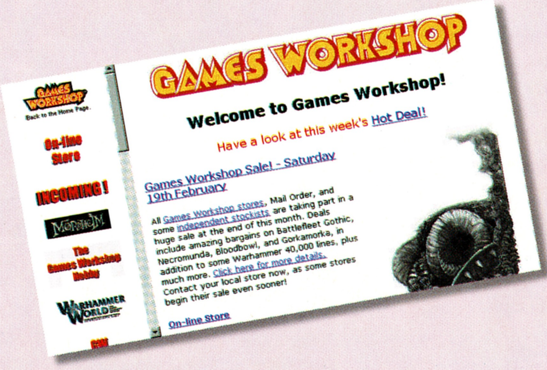
The Settlers III website can be located at www.settlers3.com – but check out the demo on our coverdisk first.

GAMES DIGEST

THE FASCINATION with all things Jurassic continues apace: US developer Illusion Machines has completed work on Dawn of War, a prehistoric (in setting rather than out-datedness) Real Time Strategy game. Dinosaurs roam the earth alongside three differently skilled proto-human tribes – Cro-Magnons, Saurians and Neanderthals. Players control one of these tribes and use different forms of magic and the ability to breed selectively (evolve?) to develop pedigree descendants with the powers needed to defeat Pterodactyls, Velociraptors and, of course, the mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex in the later levels. As well as 30 single player missions, multiplayer support is included. Dawn of War is scheduled for an April release in the US via Southpeak Interactive. It may be released in the UK via Ubisoft, Southpeak's European agents.

WESTWOOD STUDIOS has unveiled a new online option to be included with Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun Firestorm, the latest C&C expansion pack. Called World Domination, the new multiplayer mode enables players to battle for control of the world as either the Nod or GDI forces. A continent is divided into four sectors, each subdivided into 30 territories; commanders can claim overall victory when all four sectors are conquered by one or the other side. The first tournament, to be managed by Westwood, will begin shortly after Tiberian Sun: Firestorm is released, which should be March in the US and June in the UK.

Changes afoot at Workshop



Welcome to Games Workshop!

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All Games Workshop stores, Mail Order, and some independent stockists are taking part in a huge sale at the end of this month. Deals include amazing bargains on Battlefleet Gothic, Necromunda, Bloodbowl, and Gorkamorka, in addition to some Warhammer 40,000 lines, plus much more. Click here for more details. Contact your local store now, as some stores begin their sale even sooner!

UK figure manufacturer, boardgame publisher and games importer Games Workshop intends to take a more active role in the development process for games based on its various brands, Including Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000.

The group has signed licensing deals in the past which have resulted in roughly one PC game a year for the last seven years, including titles such as Warhammer: Dark Omen and Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat from Electronic Arts and Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate from SSI.

But GW's management wants to take more control of the software development for games based on its products, because it has apparently not been entirely happy with some of the resulting titles. It is understood to be reviewing its current arrangements with publishers and developers, with a view to increasing the Games Workshop presence in the software market.

At the same time, the Nottingham-based company – which also publishes the fantasy gaming magazine White Dwarf – is radically restructuring its human resources, IT and logistics departments at a cost of £5m over two years, to build up its e-commerce capabilities and to captalise on the marketing opportunities offered by the Internet.

The company says that the Internet has already proved a valuable asset, giving it the opportunity to exploit new geographic territories and support its international chain of retail outlets. Sales of its ranges of lead figures, for example, have increased "exponentially" in the US since the company website, www.games-workshop.co.uk, went live.

The UK group has also just announced its financial results for the six months to the end of November 1999, which show that global internet sales doubled during the period, contributing to a 10% increase in overall turnover. Profit before tax and exceptional items grew by 9% to £5.2m - but restructuring costs during the six months of £1.9m then knocked pre-tax profits back by 27% to £3.8m.

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WARHAMMER 40,000
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GAMES DIGEST

SIERRA'S HOTLY anticipated multiplayer add-on to its SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle (reviewed in this issue – see page 54) has finally been announced. Up to 10 players will be able to participate simultaneously in SWAT 3: Battle Plan over a LAN or Internet connection. Co-operative, death-match and tournament modes will be included, as will Level and Skin editors. The intended release date is Q3 this year, but owners of the original will be able to download the add-on for free.

INTERACTIVE STUDIOS is set to continue the Wargames franchise with Wargames: Retribution, currently due for a global May release. Code has been completed on the sequel to the colourful 1997 RTS, and will only require some fine-tuning and final confirmation from the publisher, MGM Interactive, before hitting the shelves.

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4	**Age of Empires 2: The Age of Kings** (Microsoft)
5	**Battlezone 2** (Activision)
6	**Imperium Galactica 2** (GT Interactive)
7	**Grand Prix World** (Hasbro Interactive)
8	**Planescape Torment** (Interplay)
9	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** (Electronic Arts)
10	**Roller Coaster Tycoon** (Hasbro)

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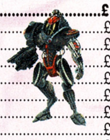

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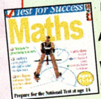

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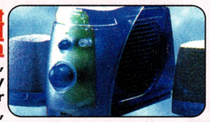

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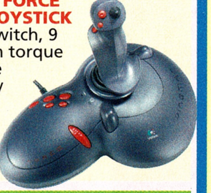

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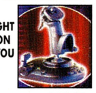

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GAMES DIGEST

BULLFROG has announced that work has begun on the third instalment of the Dungeon Keeper series. The development company is only prepared to reveal that the game is currently at the high-concept stage. Early indications, however, suggest that Old Horny will leave the confines of his dungeon and emerge, blinking, into the open air. The game will be published by EA, probably next year.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS mix in French publisher Monte Cristo's latest business sim, Economic War 2000. As the democratically elected leader of a country, the player must take control of the economy and build it up in a bid for world economic power. Other countries will, of course, be in direct conflict with you to achieve the same. It's due for an October release. A second game, Business Strategy 2000, will be released in the New Year.

AFTER WORKING with Hasbro Interactive on Risk 2, Milton Keynes-based game developer Deep Red has won a contract with SCI to develop a strategy action game based on Gerry Anderson's popular Thunderbirds TV show. SCI, owners of the world-wide rights to the cult TV series, plan to release the game in the third quarter of next year.

Infogrames ponders full amalgamation with GT

Above: Sequel to TA: Kingdoms still scheduled for release

GT Interactive, the US-based publisher which French company Infogrames bought 70% of last year, lost nearly $118 million in its third quarter. Following the departure of Thomas Heymann and John Baker, GT Interactive's chief executive officer and chief operating officer respectively, Bruno Bonnell, the CEO and chairman of Infogrames, has taken over both positions. The two companies may now fully amalgamate their US operations; a committee is currently considering Bonnell's proposal that they do so.

As reported in PCSG last issue, in Europe GT's operations have already merged with Infogrames'. GT's European budget publishing wing has been closed, as has Cavedog Studios, the US developer of the highly successful Total Annihilation series. Infogrames says Cavedog's demise stems from the cancellation and slippage of several high-profile projects. The TA franchise should not be seriously affected, although some delays are inevitable, and the Cavedog name will continue to be used by Infogrames as a brand name. Total Annihilation 2, for example, will be released under the Cavedog brand although the game's development has been transferred to Singletrac, a separate programming division owned by GT Interactive.

Red Thunder hits the (virtual) streets

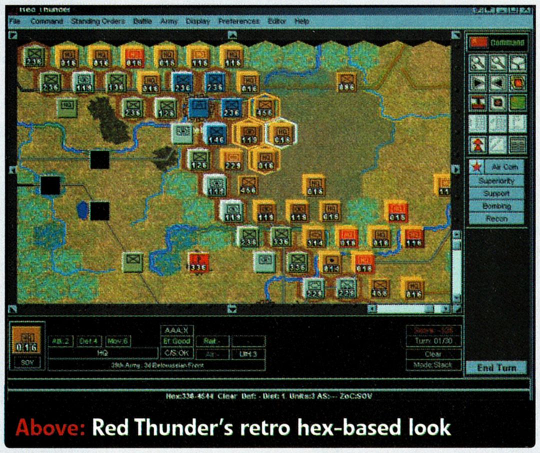
US wargames design company Edensoft has launched its debut release, a hex- and turn-based wargame entitled Victory in the East: Red Thunder.

Set in Eastern Europe during the summer of 1944, it covers the Soviet offensive against the German Army Group Centre to liberate Byelorussia and certain areas of Poland. Players can take command of either of the two armies.

The game has a deliberately retro feel to it, sharing a number of graphical and coding similarities with Talonsoft's Operational Art of War series and even classic hex-and counter table top games, a genre that the company feels has been neglected of late.

Edensoft promises that what the game lacks in graphical thrills, however, will be amply compensated by the mass of historically accurate data which has been factored in to unit design and combat resolution.

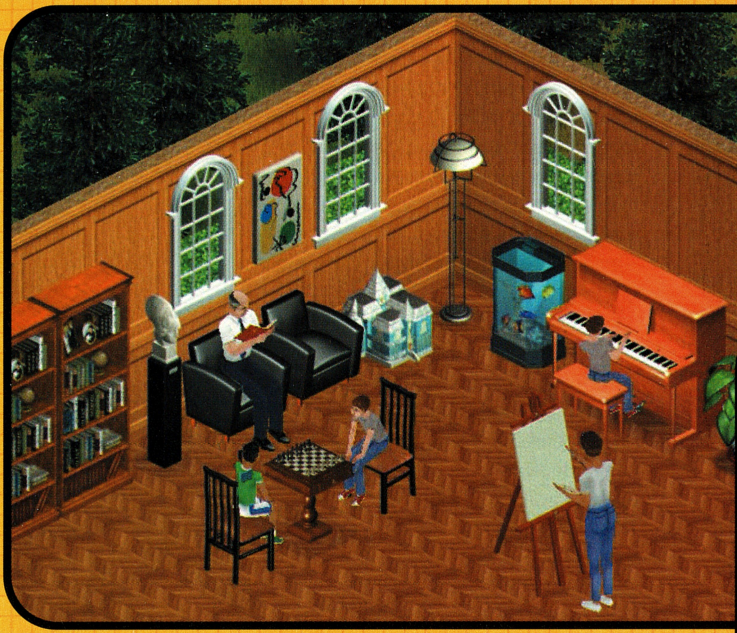
Red Thunder is only available via download from the company website: gamers first download a demo of the game, then if they like it, they can buy an encryption key for $29.99 which converts the demo version to the full version. Edensoft intends to publish additional scenarios over the next few months, available for download from its website, www.eden-soft.com.

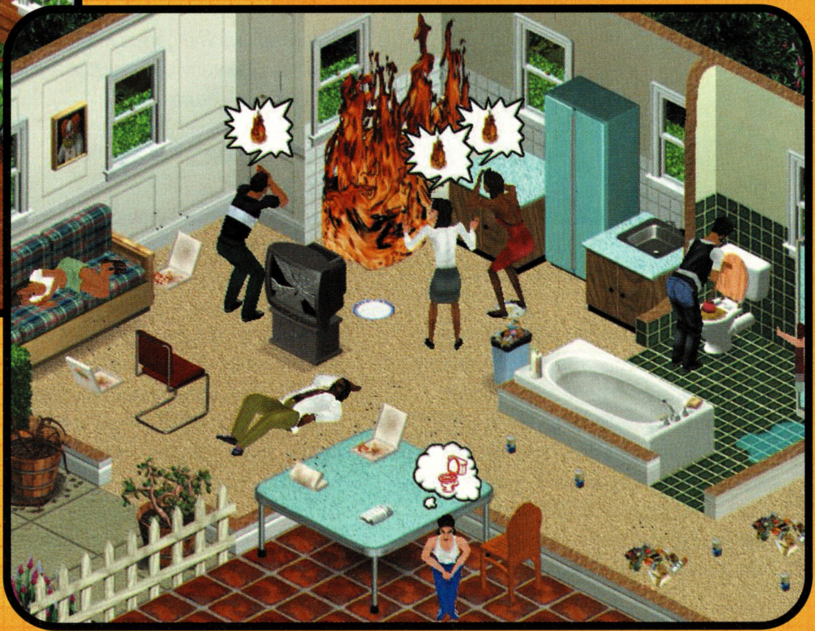

Red Thunder
File Command Standing Orders Battle Army Display Preferences Editor Help
Command
End Turn

Above: Red Thunder's retro hex-based look

Raise a family...

The Sims





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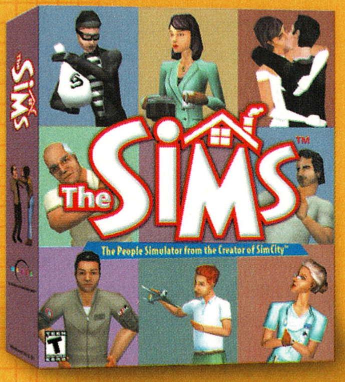

PC CD

MAXIS

Meet The Sims at www.TheSims.com

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Letters

Have your say on strategy gaming issues that really get your goat...

WHERE'S THE WEBSITE COVERAGE?

Hi,

Just a quick word to say that it is great to see a PC Games magazine dedicated to strategy gaming. I hope all goes well.

Perhaps you could have a section (articles or lists) on websites for strategy gamers in the magazine? I operate two relevant web pages – UK Rail Express, for Railroad Tycoon, and Airport Inc. Online.

J Matthew Horton, by e-mail

PC
REVIEWED
IMPERIUM GALACTICA II page 46
ALIEN CROSSFIRE page 58
PREVIEWED
SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR page 25
METAL FATIGUE page 26
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INTERVIEW WITH THE KING OF STRATEGY SID MEIER EXCLUSIVE!
ALSO INCLUDES:
LEGO ROCK RAIDERS · CLOSE COMBAT IV: BATTLE OF THE BULGE · DIPLOMACY
TZAR: BURDEN OF THE CROWN PLUS: BOOKS, VIDEOS AND MUCH MUCH MORE...

PCSG We'd always planned to do a section where we cover websites which are relevant to strategy gamers, but in our old offices our web access was just too limited to review sites properly. Now we're in our brand spanking new location with a view of the River Thames and oodles of bandwidth, we're able to do it – as you will discern from the contents page.

We won't just be covering game specific sites: we'll also be looking at sites for films, books, publishers, museums, interest groups - in fact, anything we think would appeal to our readers, and takes our fancy. Plus, as you can see from our round-up article on American Civil War games in this issue, we'll also refer to interesting websites within some of our features.

AGAIN, AGAIN...

Dear PCSG,

I just thought that I would write to you to say that I have just read your new magazine, PC Strategy Games and enjoyed it.

Have you thought about reviewing web based strategy games? I thought that I would mention an internet based strategy game called Tartarus that I have been introduced to, which seems to be gaining popularity. It is written in Java and can run on various platforms. Tartarus is run by Faraway Games and is based in the United Kingdom, but is also popular in the United States, as well as other countries. The website is www.faraway.co.uk, and then follow the links to Tartarus. Version 4.0 has just been released and is available for download for free. I would be happy to help, if you would like me to do a review of the game. I am just a player, so I would give an honest opinion.

Adam Sparshott, by e-mail

PCSG Well, on the website review point, we've pretty much covered the ground in the reply to J Matthew Horton's letter, above. But on your second point, Adam, if there's a game you want to tell PC Strategy Games readers about, then you really should be visiting our website, www.pcstrategygames.com. We're trying to create an archive of short game reviews there, so that our readers can share information (and perhaps even have a good old-fashioned but polite argument) about games they like.

There's a section on the PCSG site where you can drop in a review and send it to us for evaluation – we do reserve the right to edit reviews or even not use them if they're libellous, just plain wrong factually, suspect (in terms of possible connections between supposedly independent reviewers and games publishers) or if we already have enough reviews of a particular game.

HARDCORE TURN-BASED VS RTS

Dear PCSG

It's refreshing to see that a title dedicated solely to the strategy gamer has finally made its way onto the market. As a dedicated player of strategy games, I've often found myself non-plussed by the lack of support given by the specialist games press to this genre of gaming, and have long maintained that there's a large constituency of gamers out there who remain uncatered for.

I've got to admit that when it comes strategy games I'm a little bit of a snob. I don't for example believe that games such as Command and Conquer or Total Annihilation are bona fide strategy games. That's not to say that they're not good games in their own right, it's just that they don't exactly provide the most cerebral of challenges. My personal preferences lie with what are traditionally regarded as more hardcore strategy games such as Talonsoft's Battleground series or Sid Meier's Gettysburg! Because these games aren't at the cutting edge graphically, or perhaps are regarded as a little bit too staid by the mainstream Games press, they tend to be relegated to small, insignificant reviews or, even worse, overlooked entirely.

Above: Airport Inc. – still on the runway...

I hope that your mag will provide these games with the coverage and in-depth analysis which they deserve regardless of whether or not they require a 64 Mb graphics accelerator to run!

James Bate, by e-mail

PCSG You can rest assured that here at PCSG we're going to approach the reviewing process from a slightly different angle than some of our competitors.

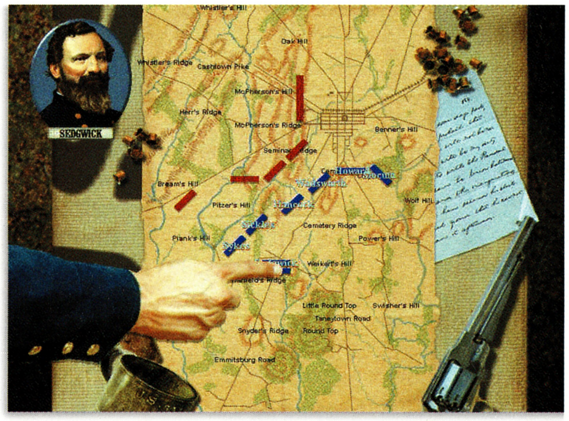
It's definitely true that strategy games, particularly the 'hardcore' variety as you call them, have gotten a raw deal over the past couple of years.

They are, by their very nature, complex, demanding and intensive beasts, asking a lot of the gamer. Similarly, in order to review these games, they've got to be played exhaustively and intensively. In effect, the reviewer has got make a concerted effort to get under their skin.

Above: Age of Empires II: Age of Kings

To put it another way, if you've got to review the latest Quake clone, you know in advance more or less what you're going to get in terms of game mechanics, graphics and gameplay. An hour or two spent playing it, should, more or less, tell you whether the thing is any good or not.

With strategy games it's an entirely different kettle of fish, and this approach simply will not work. We're going to play these games, intensively, analyse and dissect them. We're also going to allocate the space necessary to tease out the subtleties and intricacies which many of these games comprise. Ultimately, we hope to redress the balance in favour of the strategy gamer and provide a magazine that you can call your very own.



Above: American Civil warring

CAN'T FIND THE AIRPORT

Dear PCSG,

I bought the magazine as soon as I saw it, and loved it. But – and it's a big but – although the cover CD doesn't mention it, the 'What's on the CD' section says there's a playable demo of Airport Inc. on the disk. There isn't. I would have loved to load that game up, because lots of people I know have been talking about it. So what happened?

Peter Lister, Richmond, Surrey

PCSG Unfortunately, there was something of a mix-up over the Airport Inc. demo – and, we cringe as we recount this tale – the same mix-up has happened again this month.

Take 2 told us we'd been given a playable demo for cover disk use, but when we loaded it up, it was actually an alpha build of the game from last August. There were profuse apologies from Take 2, and the promise of a demo for issue two.

But when we checked the second version out, it was the same one. In fact, it turns out there isn't an Airport Inc. demo for cover disk use – yet. Last month, we forgot to take the reference to Airport out of the 'What's on the CD' section. This month, we actually claim to have an Airport demo on the CD sleeve (and we don't). What can we say? In this industry, things like that are going to happen every now and then, and Take 2 has now committed to getting us a demo for issue three.

And to make up for letting our readers down, they've offered us five copies of the game and 10 vouchers for free flights on Virgin Express to use as competition prizes. You'll find the competition in next month's magazine – alongside an Airport Inc demo.

PC STRATEGY GAMES Letter of the Month

MULTIPLAY COVERAGE MISSING

Hi Martin,

It gave me substantial pleasure to see a strategy games magazine again. We hope you do better than your predecessors! I haven't read all of the first issue of the mag yet, but I have found something which I think could do with some improvement.

There is poor coverage in the reviews of how well multiplayer is implemented. For example, both in the review of Imperium Galactica II and of Close Combat IV you put an actual value on Multiplay in the Verdict. IGII gets 7/10 and CCIV gets 6/10. But nowhere in the article does it describe why – what is bad and what is good.

Not good enough. You need a sidebar which covers the multiplayer aspects of the game. Why? Multiplayer games are what matters to a lot of players these days and particularly to me and my friends....

Let me explain. I work and hang out with a number of people who have been playing strategic war games for twenty years. We love things like the Europa Series and War in Europe [*classic board wargames – ed*], but we just don't have the time to play these things anymore.

We have played a lot of Civ 2 and other such games, but in the end it is multiplayer games which keeps us glued to the computer these days. We generally won't play a game if it doesn't have a decent multiplayer option, to the point that we are currently using 90% of our playing time to play Everquest. Even though that couldn't ever claim to be a strategic game, it is in my opinion the best multiplayer game around.

I don't think I have played a computer game in single player mode for several years, but I have spent a lot of time playing Diablo, C&C, Total Annihilation, Age of Empires, TacOps, Civ 2, Call to Power etc. But ALWAYS networked. (OK, we play some single player to learn the mechanics, but that is it.)

I don't suggest that you only report on multiplayer, but I DO suggest that you always report on the multiplayer aspect and do it consistently. Multiplayer is the future and it is a lot more fun than playing stupid AIs.

Keep that mag coming, we need it.

Best regards

Thomas Bjelkeman-Pettersson, by e-mail

PCSG Thanks, Thomas – it's a lot more useful when people tell us what they think the magazine's missing than when they tell us they love it. And you said you loved it, too.

You're right - we do need to increase our coverage of multiplay. Certainly when we put the dummy for PC Strategy Games together at the end of last year, we had a major review of Age of Empires II: Age of Kings which included a sidebar on how the game played with four people — because that's how many people we had linked on one router in the office.

We would like to be able to get more people playing games here, so we can test out how some of them are with eight or more people – but unfortunately, we do publish other magazines and they'd not be happy if we annexed their computers for a day...

Once issue two is out of the way, we'll sit down and have a long hard think about just how we can go about doing it.

Any suggestions?

Majesty: Sovereign

***Mark Shaw** looks at Cyberlore's latest offering where you don't control units, you bribe them...*

MAJESTY: SOVEREIGN OF ARDANIA
DEVELOPER: Cyberlore
PUBLISHER: Hasbro Interactive
PROJECTED RELEASE DATE: March 2000

US developer Cyberlore has enjoyed a fair measure of success with its fantasy-based games – it wouldn't be too far-fetched to claim that it was the original Warcraft rather than Command & Conquer that ignited the current RTS craze. Although the company hasn't strayed too far from this well-worn path with **Majesty: Sovereign of Ardania**, it has at least tried to breathe new life into a genre that is already in danger of stagnation.

Majesty is a curious beast. Anyone familiar with other Cyberlore games and its in-house style will recognise it as a quest-based Dungeons & Dragons style RTS – except that there is one major difference that sets it apart from anything else we've ever seen.

WHEELING AND DEALING

Although most of the genre's typical features are present and correct, the game's unit management system is unique. You don't order people to do things – you bribe them, through a system of rewards.

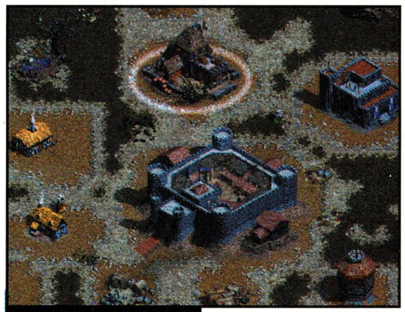
In each mission, the player assumes the role of sovereign of a province in the mystical realm of Ardania, with only a palace, a few buildings and a pile of gold to assist him or her in completing the task set. The primary objective of each mission is to establish a well-run community, enabling different guilds to be constructed by your peasants and a variety of heroes to be hired.

On the beginner levels, these are restricted to Warriors, Rangers and Wizards but later on in the game other character types, including Elves, Healers and the mysterious Solarii, each with their own different characteristics, become available. Wizards, naturally, are adept in the use of magic but are no match for some of the bigger monsters. This is where your trusty Warriors come in. Armed with sword and shield, these foot-soldiers will rough up the opposition... at a price.

Double-clicking on a monster (there are 32 different types, from Goblins via Trolls to Minotaurs) or an evil structure puts a reward flag on it.

By upping the value of the reward, different heroes can be persuaded to venture off, mercenary style, to do your bidding at the price you set. Likewise, double-clicking on the black, unexplored areas of the map will set an explore flag, offering gold to your hired hands to go over there and gradually roll back the fog-of-war as they move into uncharted territory.

Free the Slaves
Majesty



Above: Ardania is full of beautiful buildings – it's a pity to have to raze them to the ground

The AI rather than the player, therefore, controls the different heroes, dictating their routes across the map, selecting their targets and so on. All of these money-grabbing minions can be made to explore the map, locate the source of evil and give it a good kicking, but the player has no direct control over the movement or action of these heroes. Rather than a bog-standard point-and-click interface, Majesty's USP is its reward-based system – greed is good, or perhaps show me the money.

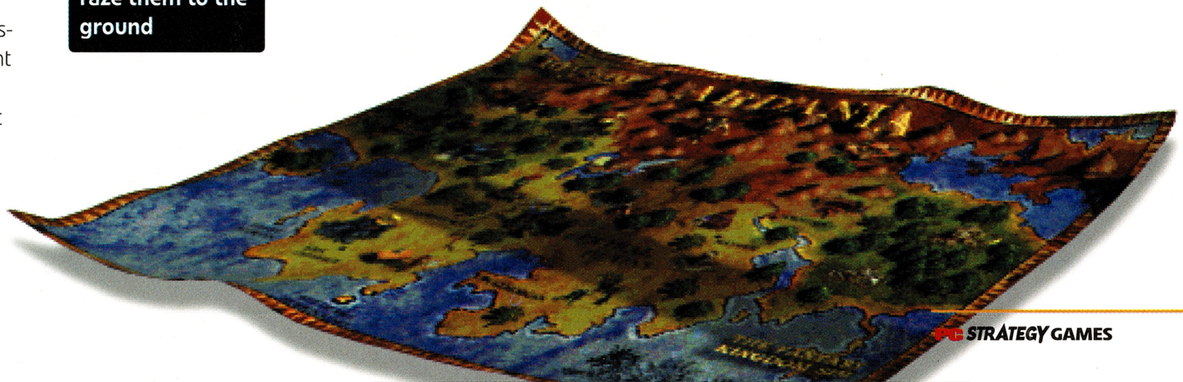
The Palace is the control centre of each quest. From here, players can monitor their progress, check outstanding rewards and expand their town with new buildings that provide an array of new options. The library, for example, gives access to new spells for your wizards, while the blacksmith improves weapons and armour needed by your Warriors. Guard towers, on the other hand, provide protection for your palace, and Inns are vital for restoring the health of all your heroes.

GAIN FROM EXPERIENCE

These buildings can be upgraded, offering further advancements that improve the heroes' chances of survival and increase the likeliness of completing each quest in turn.

Characters gain experience points through exploring the map, uncovering treasure chests, battling monsters and completing quests. These experience points determine the level of your adventurers, which in turn set certain characteristics, like the number of hit-points available. Keeping your heroes alive is a challenge, but the longer they cheat death, the more useful they will be.

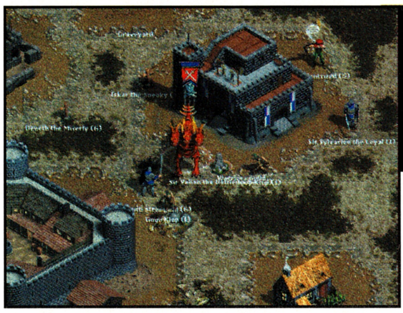
The graphics, while fairly uncomplicated compared to other games set in similar fantasy milieux, add to a much-neglected area of gaming – humour. The cartoonish look and the comic names lend to the quirky feel, which is exacerbated by the use of sound –



# of Ardania

each type of hero, for example has its own unique set of appropriate, deliberately cliched sayings that helps the player in differentiating between them.

Incidentally, The slightly odd colour scheme – blue and yellow for units as opposed to the more traditional green and red – apparently stems from the high incidence of colour-blindness amongst the programmers. That's not to dis the look of the game in any way: graphically, it's good though not ground-breaking.



Left: Oh, why can't humans and dragons learn to get along and live like good neighbours?

While it appears on the surface – unit control system aside – like a run-of-the-mill fantasy-based RTS, it has more in common with a business sim.

It's only through the careful management of each kingdom that sufficient monies can be accrued with which to construct the various guilds, recruit adventurers and pay the rewards. As well as establishing trade routes to other communities and extorting money with the aid of the Rogues guild, tax collectors make regular trips to each building within the Kingdom to collect the fantasy version of Council Tax. As your kingdom expands, so greater profits can be reaped.

TO THE END... AND BEYOND

Once the princess has been rescued, the slaves freed or the Wicked Witch of the West clubbed around the head with a flying Kansas farmhouse, the player can advance to the next scenario.

Interestingly, the player is offered the opportunity to continue playing each map after the quest has been fulfilled. This is because Cyberlore believes that completing the quest is only part of the game's satisfaction.

Based on what we've seen so far, Majesty has potential, but the question that nobody can answer yet is whether the game's unique management system will hold players' attention in the long term.

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STAR TREK ARMADA
DEVELOPER: Activision
PUBLISHER: Activision
PROJECTED RELEASE DATE: April 2000

Star Trek Armada

***Barry Ryan** powers up phasers and flings himself into battle with the latest in a long line of Star Trek games*

It appears that our appetite for Star Trek spin-off games is insatiable. To date, we've seen Star Trek titles in practically every conceivable gaming genre. From first person shooters to point and click adventures, we've had them all. The one formula which hadn't been tried was a classic RTS resource management game in the Command and Conquer mould – probably due to the difficulties imposed by developing a game of this nature in a fully 3D environment.

Interplay's forthcoming Star Trek New Worlds neatly circumvents this problem by ensuring that the game remains planet bound. Activision, though, has adopted a different strategy and has brought us a space based RTS set in the Star Trek universe. You'll be able to command one of four perennial Star Trek staples: The Federation, The Klingon Empire, The Borg or The Romulans. Each race has its own campaign, which takes the form of a series of 'episodes', as in an instalment from one of the myriad TV Star Trek variants. Each episode is presaged by its own movie, which is very impressive and will no doubt elicit an enthusiastic response from Trekkies everywhere.

The game itself appears to follow a tried and tested RTS resource management formula. The resource in question is the ubiquitous Dilithium crystal, which will need to be mined from platforms which you will set up close to the many Dilithium moons dotted around the gameplay arena. Dilithium is the engine of industry for all four of the races.

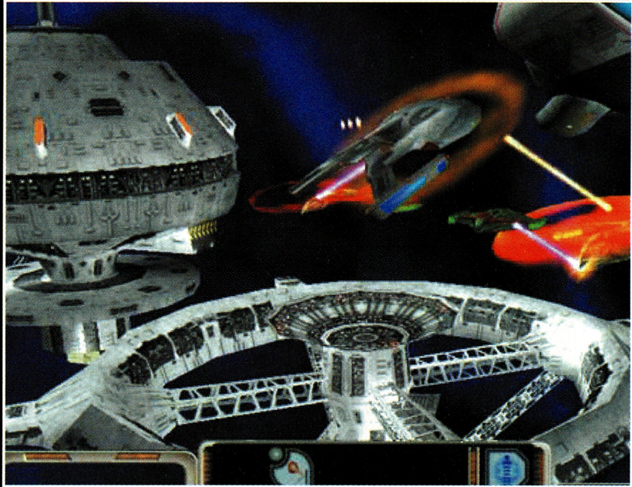
You will also be able to choose from an array of other structures including starbases, research facilities, defence platforms etc... There's the usual tech and build trees which are pretty comprehensive. Each race has its own complement of ship types based faithfully on the fleets encountered in the various TV series.

The basic types are cruiser class, destroyer class, scout class and battleship class. The cruisers form the backbone of your fleets, the destroyers provide the heavy firepower and the scouts, being nimble and manoeuvrable, are particularly intended for reconnaissance tasks. Battleships are essentially fleet flagships.

UNIQUE FEATURE

Romulan cruisers include the Warbird and Raptor class ships, while the Federation destroyer is none other than the venerable Defiant Class of Deep Space Nine fame. All ship types have one unique ability. For example, a Federation Akira Class Cruiser has the rather lovely chain reaction pulsar at its disposal. This is a weapon which gets progressively stronger with every ship hit... nice. The Klingon battleship Negh'var sports a plasma cannon which is capable of directing a powerful plasma blast at one target.

Each race also has a speciality ship which is very much in tune with their Star Trek personas. For example, the enigmatic, underhand Romulans get The Gargoyle, which has an array of dastardly devices including the holo-emitter to confuse enemy ships into attacking each other, while the Klingon Fek'Lar can initiate the



Above: The Romulans stage a bold assault on a Federation starbase

Death Chant which will increase the efficacy of all Klingon ships in its range.

Ships' crews constitute a very important aspect of the game. For a start, you can't build a ship at one of your shipyards if the necessary crew compliment isn't available. You'll need to build starbases to attract and house prospective crew members.

The systems on each ship can be accessed from the ship's information panel. These systems include shields, engines, life support, sensors and weapons. You can quickly gauge the status of these systems for each respective ship.

If a system is damaged, the more crew a ship has, the faster that system is repaired. Similarly if a ship takes a beating and over 50% of the crew are disabled, then the ship's functionality will be seriously compromised.

No Star Trek game would be complete without transporter options, and on this score Armada doesn't disappoint. You can try to board and capture ships once their shields are down. The Klingons are very good at implementing this technique, while the Romulans are the least piratically inclined. Also, if a ship has been badly damaged, and its crew mauled, it's a good idea to beam in some crew replacements from another ship to speed up the repair process.

Quote

> **There was a time when Star Trek's various PC outings weren't exactly synonymous with quality and excellence. That is changing**

Unquote

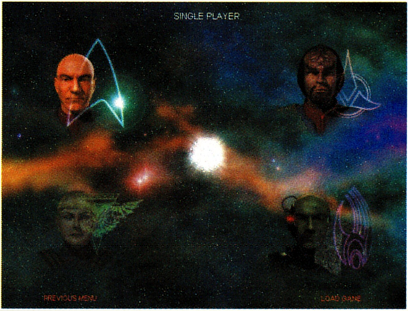
Graphically the game looks good. You can see it in two modes, the strategic view, and the very smart fully rotatable cinematic view. While the cinematic option is pleasing from an aesthetic point of view, attempting to play the game from this perspective would be tantamount to suicide. You'll probably find yourself utilising the top down strategic view for 95% of the time, and resorting to the cinematic view when there's a particularly juicy battle which would lend itself well to the medium.

BESPOKE C AND C

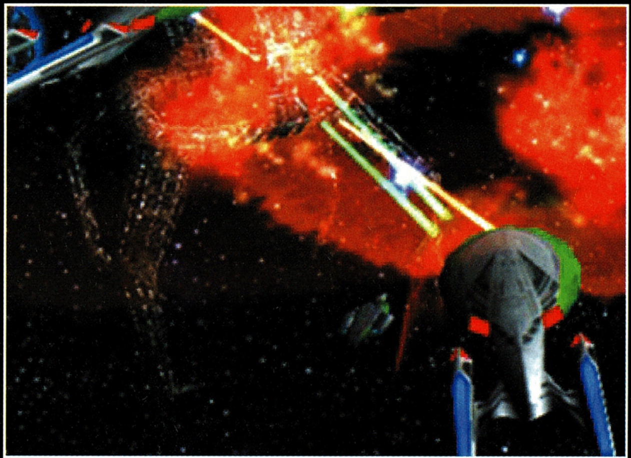
The Command and Control system is simplicity itself and anybody who has any familiarity with the RTS genre will have no difficulty in getting to grips with it.

Uniquely, Armada allows you to customise the command and control interface to suit your own gameplay style by mixing and matching its various elements. The game also contains a very nice hex grid which can clear up some of the confusion which results from playing in a fully 3D arena. From the preview code we've had in the PCSG offices, it appears that Activision has done a very good job with this particular Star Trek franchise. There was a time when Star Trek's various PC outings weren't exactly synonymous with quality and excellence.

That seems to be changing, and of late a number of very solid titles have appeared. Armada looks set to continue this trend. However, once you get past the Star Trek associations and the pretty graphics engine, it really is little more than a conventional RTS. Having said that, it's extremely playable and has some nice tweaks and innovations.



Above: Choose your race here



Above: Federation ships attack a Borg base

As it's a Star Trek title it will, undoubtedly, do well. On a cautionary note, though, I'd first like to see what Interplay has managed to do with Star Trek New Worlds before I go getting all excited about this one. PCSG.

Earth 2150

*Topware Interactive's new RTS has taken Germany by storm, but will it be epoch-making on this side of the Channel? **Barry Ryan** checks it out*

EARTH 2150
DEVELOPER: Topware Interactive
PUBLISHER: Mattel
PROJECTED RELEASE DATE: Summer 2000

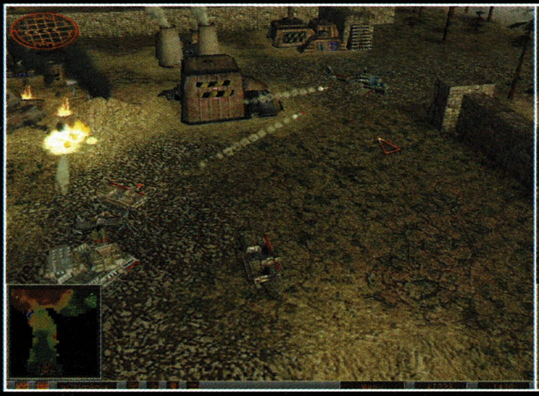
Last month we brought you news of Topware Interactive's **Earth 2150**. Out already in Germany, its country of origin, the good news is that UK gamers are going to get their hands on it pretty soon and be able to judge it for themselves. In the meantime, we've managed to obtain some previewable code, and as we've found ourselves playing it rather a lot, we're now in a position to provide you with a fairly comprehensive lowdown.

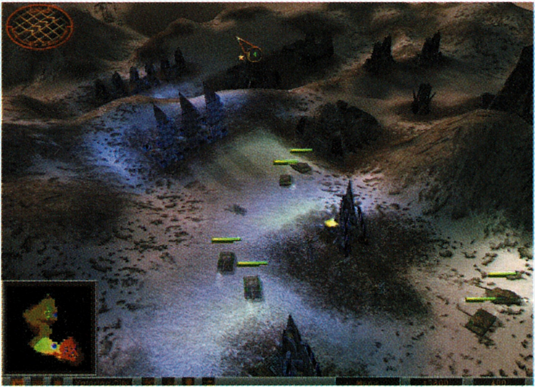
The year, unsurprisingly enough, is 2150. In the preceding century and half, mankind has gone through a series of traumatic upheavals which, to put it mildly, have had a deleterious effect on the race in general and more particularly on poor old mother Earth herself.

First, there was the disastrous worldwide economic crash in the early years of the new millennium, plunging the global economy into chaos. Then a spate of conflicts completely destroyed the old nation states. It was during this phase that a significant segment of the Earth's population, horrified at the slaughter and chaos, pre-emptorily upped sticks and left to form their own utopian society (The Lunar Corporation) on the moon. Best place for 'em really.

The Eurasian Dynasty arose from the ashes of the old Asian states, such as Russia and China. The appallingly named United Civilised States was formed from the remnants of the good old US of A, Canada and the South American nations. The Eurasian Dynasty and the United Civilised States, obviously not learning a jot from the horrors of the preceding 150 years, are quickly at each other's throats.

In a spat over the Arctic Circle, they deploy nuclear weapons, which puts Earth's orbit out of sync and sends the whole kit and caboodle (Moon included)





Above left: Missile units launch a deadly salvo at an unfortunate helicopter
Above right: Armoured units of the Eurasian Dynasty press home their attack in the depths of winter

plummeting towards the sun. This concentrates minds and it's not long before the various factions realise that the only way to avoid extinction is to get off the doomed planet pronto. Unfortunately, they've got to compete for limited resources in order to construct an escape fleet. This is where you come in. You'll take command of one of the three factions and begin extracting the resources and material which will ensure that it's your faction which escapes the inevitable cataclysm.

The three factions have evolved radically different technologies. The Eurasian Dynasty will be the most instantly recognisable to those of you who've dabbled with previous RTS offerings such as Command & Conquer. Their military units are based on tank chassis, and their buildings and structures look like something from the industrial revolution. The United Civilised States employ mech-type vehicles, heavily redolent of the GDI units in Tiberian Sun. The Lunar Corporation utilises the most radical units in terms of design, based largely on hover technologies. Each faction makes extensive use of air and naval power (obviously the Lunar Corporation's Hover units are equally at home on land or sea) with all the standard units available: fighter craft, bombers, helicopters and air re-supply units etc.

The essential point about this fundamental technological difference is that playing with different factions demands a completely different tactical approach, which should ensure that the game is eminently replayable. When you combine this with the fact that each faction has a separate campaign mode with different scenarios and storyline, we're looking at a game that should provide a very worthwhile long term investment.

There is an extremely complex R&D aspect to Earth 2150. As you play, you'll find yourself designing new weapon technologies, vehicles, chassis etc. The process is ongoing and it's absolutely essential that you devote a lot of time and energy to R&D or you'll quickly find yourself wiped out by a technologically superior opponent. If you are a devotee of top down, resource management RTS, you'll be instantly familiar with the game mechanics.

Despite the fact that the tech tree is exhaustive and the available structures and build options are extremely comprehensive, there really isn't very much to set it apart from its RTS bedfellows.

VISUAL FEAST

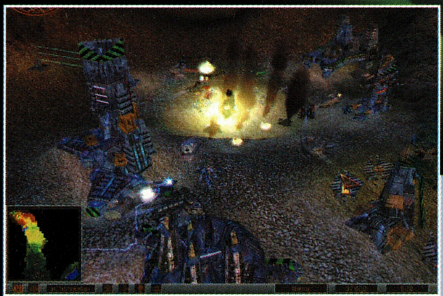
The gamescapes are absolutely amazing and definitely the best yet seen in an RTS of this type. The downside of all this graphical excellence is that you're going to need a hefty rig, complete with substantial graphics card, to run the thing, especially when the action hots up.

Where Earth 2150 does shine is in its implementation of a number of innovative features which the RTS genre had been crying out for. Firstly, we've got very plausible, and widely differing climatic conditions which do affect the gameplay. For example, sudden unexpected blizzards can leave you snowbound and hampered by non-existent visibility. Use the weather conditions to your advantage by coinciding your attacks with a spell of poor weather and you're bound to catch your opponent off guard. The terrain also impinges on the performance of your units. A unit traversing a steep slope will naturally experience a drop off in speed. Some areas will be impassable to all but the most mobile units.

There's also a day-night cycle, and it's not just a gimmick. All your units have a headlight function which can be turned on or off. An attack force which assaults under cover of darkness with lights deactivated should have surprise on its side. The action can also be taken underground giving an extra tier of play. This seems to represent an emerging RTS trend given that Zono Inc's upcoming RTS, Metal Fatigue (previewed last month) utilises a similar approach.

But the single most exciting aspect of Earth 2150 is its multiplay facility. This game has been designed with multi-playability very much to the fore. Sure, you'll get all the usual options, random map generators, skirmish modes etc. But Earth 2150 also comes complete with one of the best map editors seen in a game of this type. You'll start off with a flat plan of an arena, and you'll then be able to, well, morph the terrain using your mouse. You can effortlessly form mountain chains, vast depressions and lakes creating your own unique levels, with the minimum of fuss and effort.

If the final game lives up to the potential promised by the preview code we've been dabbling with, it may even supplant Starcraft and Total Annihilation as the RTS devotees' online tipple of choice. We've got a policy here at PCSG of not waxing lyrical about games which we've only played in pre-release form – it's only common sense after all: as we all know, there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. However, given that Earth 2150 has already taken the Continent by storm and that all that's needed for a UK release should be a little bit of software localisation, I think we can be a little optimistic about this one. PCSG.



Left: Conflict rages all over a beautifully rendered map

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What's on our website

If you like what you see in the magazine, then you'll want to visit us online. You'll find reviews, news, links, patches, discussion groups and much more

If you've read this far, then chances are you're a dedicated strategy gamer who is looking for more authoritative and more in-depth information about the games you like to play.

Well, hopefully the print version of PC Strategy Games is going to give you just that sort of coverage. And if it doesn't, then we want to know where you think we're going wrong, so get e-mailing.

But PC Strategy Games is more than just a magazine: we have also launched our own website, www.pcstrategygames.com, where you'll find even more information about the games you love. Don't expect our website to be just an electronic version of the print-based magazine, though, because that wouldn't do either the mag or the site justice.

Technology is all very well, but some things are still best done the old fashioned way. We think that you'd rather be able to read a long piece on your favourite game while you're having your supper, or lying on the sofa, or even on the bus to work – so we won't be putting the feature articles or game reviews that you see in these printedpages online. On the other hand, the Internet is the perfect tool for finding and sorting large amounts of data swiftly, and presenting information in a concise manner.

So amongst the things you'll find on our website will be short, concise reviews (a bit like our 300 word opinion boxes in the reviews in the magazine). You'll be able to search the site and find out what we think of that game you've just eyed up in the shop down the road.

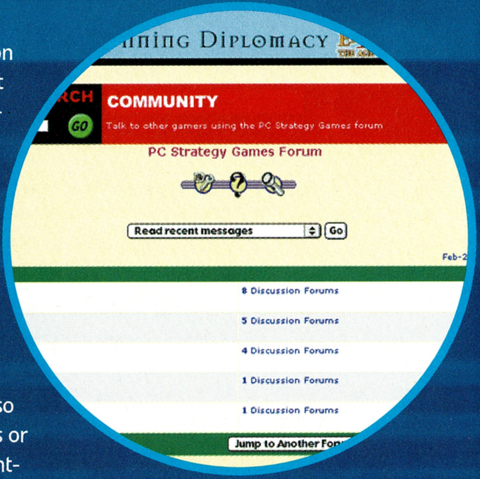
But – and this is an important but – what we think isn't everything: we also want to know what you think about the games we are covering. So we're going to be using the website as a forum for your views – and one of the ways we're going to be doing that is by letting PC Strategy Games readers submit their own short reviews of their favourite games. Oh, and games they think aren't worth the effort it takes to load them up...

Here's a taster for what you'll find on our site at the moment. I say at the moment, because a website should never be set in stone or it'll quickly be out of date. We are constantly updating the web material as news and previews break.

Instead, a website should be a living entity, one that's constantly evolving. So make sure you keep dropping by to check what the newest changes are.

Better yet, why not sign up for our monthly e-mail newsletter, which will keep you up to date on what's in the latest issue of the magazine as well as what's happening on the website?

If you register for the newsletter before April 30, 2000, then you could win a year's free subscription to the magazine. PCSG.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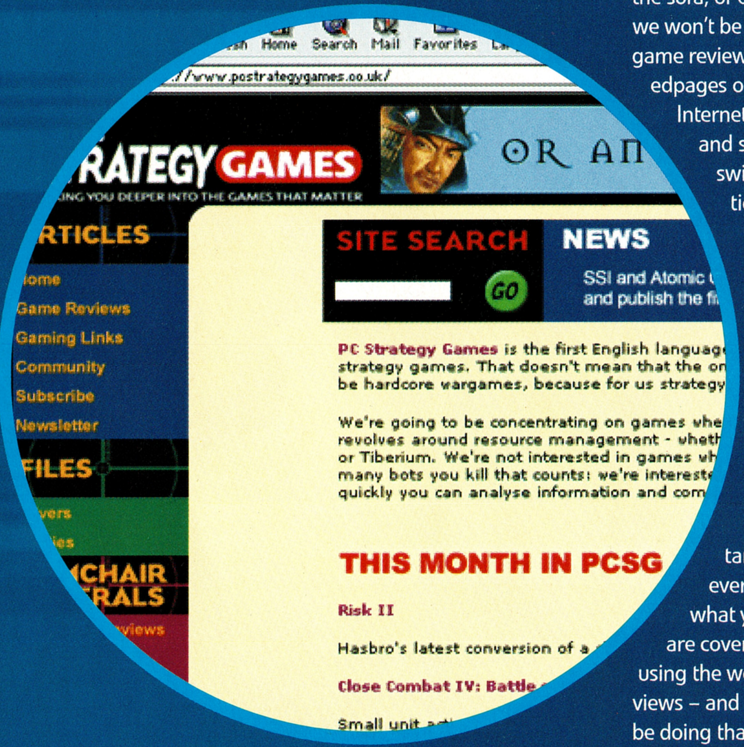

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Close Combat IV: Battle

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We're going to be concentrating on games whe revolves around resource management - wheth or Tiberium. We're not interested in games wh many bots you kill that counts: we're intereste quickly you can analyse information and com

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What can we say? We'd like you to subscribe to PC Strategy Games, because we think it's a great read and you shouldn't run the risk of having your local newsagent run out. Plus, Crimson Publishing Ltd has a number of other titles which you might be interested in. Take a look.

GAME REVIEWS

This is the page where we're going to put all our short game reviews. You'll be able to search for a game by title, or use the handy alphabetical index to find the title you may want to check out. You could just browse. Plus, it's here that you'll find the form you need to fill in if you want to submit your own review of a favourite game. Be warned, though – we do reserve the right to edit reviews for spelling and grammar, or for legal reasons. Also, for space reasons, we can only carry a certain number of reviews of each title.

BOOKS & VIDEO REVIEWS

We don't think you spend all of your time in front of the computer playing games. In fact, we think you enjoy reading good books and watching films and videos just as much as we do. So we've included an area on the site where we're going to be publishing brief reviews of the latest books we've been reading or videos we've been watching. They won't just be dry old history books or ducumentaries, either: we'll include science fiction, crime, thrillers, graphic novels and just about anything else that catches our fancy. And if there's enough demand for it, we'll let PC Strategy Games readers recommend titles they think other people would enjoy.

DRIVERS & UTILITIES

Our site carries a selection of indispensable utilities, including DirectX, Winzip, Paintshop Pro, Adobe Acrobat and Hypersnap.

GAMING LINKS

What it says on the tin, really – an alphabetical index of links to strategy game publishers, developers and sites dedicated to individual games. If you know of a site we haven't included, then e-mail us with the link.

NEWSLETTER

Every month, after the next issue of the magazine has gone to press, we'll put together an e-mail newsletter which will fill you in on what you can expect to see in the website, and also what changes we may have made to any of the pages. Also check here for breaking news between issues. If you want to subscribe to it, then this is the place to go.

COMMUNITY

The big word in computer gaming at the moment, and one of the main reasons we've launched PC Strategy Games. We think that there are enough strategy gamers out there to form a community, if they could only talk to one another... Well, now they can. We've created a series of forums for gamers to start chatting about their favourite titles, the companies that make them, the people who develop them etc. We've set up some general discussion groups, under a variety of headings and sub-headings: but it's going to be up to you to go online and create the actual threads. So far, we've set up five folders – games, history, other worlds, online and technical – with a variety of discussion groups. There will undoubtedly be other discussion groups you want to see added, so let us know what they are. And, as with the reviews, we'll reserve the right to keep an eye on what's going on in a particular thread. We'll put a set of rules on the site as to what is and isn't considered suitable material to include in a posting, but remember that we won't necessarily be reading every message as soon as it goes on the site, so you'll have to help us police the forums to make them a safe and pleasant place to be.

www.pcstategygames.com

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That's what we've got on the site at the moment, but as I said above, we plan to keep on tinkering with it. For example, we'll probably add a section for reviews of boardgames, card games and other non-computer game related items. We're also planning to create an 'opponents wanted' section, where gamers will be able to post information about what games they play and how they play them, so they can find people to play online against. The whole point about the website is that it's supposed to be a place where people who like playing strategy games can find others of like mind easily. So make sure you tell us what you'd like to see in it. But right now, why don't you log on to www.pcstrategygames.com and take a look at the site?

Damon Wilson *explores why adults play games*

The players of games

Below: **Chess – a fun game, or a tool for learning the rules of war?**

Only the ghost of a Victorian mill owner would deny that children need to play for a large proportion of their time. It's accepted that playing with other kids develops social skills, while playing alone develops the child's imagination. But why do adults play? Surely, the very fact that we have survived past our teens suggests we have learned the lessons play has to offer, and should now devote our time to profitable things like work, wars and having lots of babies.

Of course, I'm being ironic. The post-war, Pepsi generation has proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that adulthood is a myth. As Eric Idle, of Monty Python fame, once noted: "all the kids are on drugs and all the adults are on roller-skates."

So the fact that you and I spend a lot of our spare time playing computer games is hardly surprising – we're not recapturing our lost youth, we never actually left it behind. Indeed, we are hanging on to it like grim death.

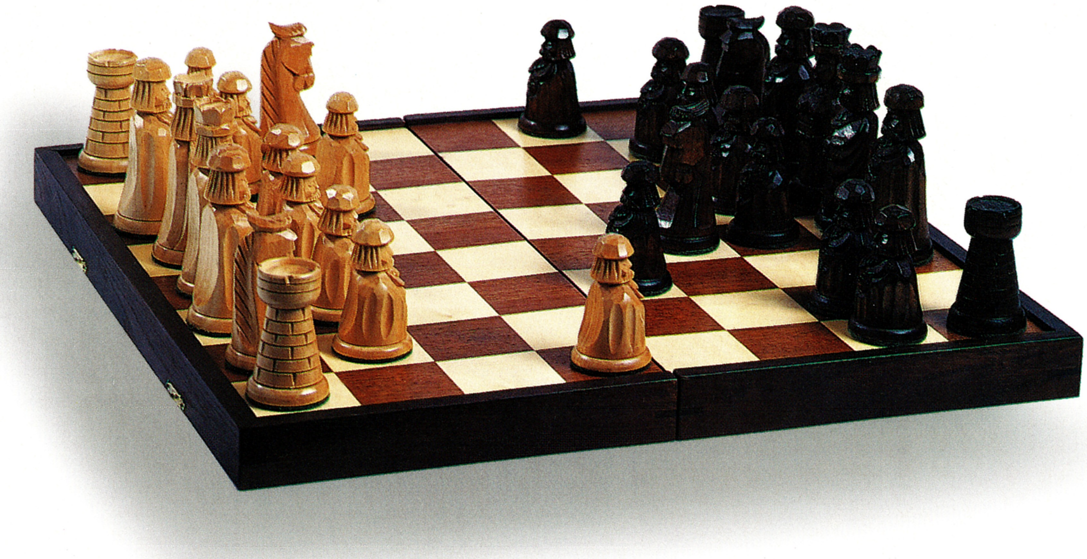
The fact is that humans, from the cradle to the grave, need to devote a large part of their time to games of one sort or another, but not even professors of psychology are quite sure why. The mechanics of games and gameplay permeate every level of human activity, from sport to corporate affairs, and recreational play often prepares us for the serious games of career, relationships and general survival.

In the late '40s, gameplay began to be taken very seriously in the academic, political and especially the military circles of the United States. The invention of the atom bomb had already shaken a lot of the military old guard: not that many complained about it being inhumane - it was just that they had little idea of how to successfully field a strategic weapon of such enormous destructive power.

This strategic problem worsened to crisis level when the Soviets revealed, in 1948, that they had the atomic bomb as well. The arms race (and the Cold War) began in earnest, and the phrase 'mutually assured destruction' was heard for the first time in the corridors of the Pentagon.

Then, as if in answer to a general's prayer, a group of academics called the Rand Corporation offered a new mathematical theory to help rationalise the terrifying stand-off: it was called Game Theory.

The idea is said to have been invented by



the mathematician and H-bomb scientist, John von Neumann - supposedly in the middle of a game of poker.

Game theory had, in fact, been utilised by US military chiefs to a limited extent to plan operations during World War II, but the Rand Corporation, boosted by the Cold War, took it to a position of policy pre-eminence during the '50s and '60s.

Game theory states that in any situation involving conflict of interests a mathematical set of rules can be utilised to understand and, more importantly, predict the actions of the participants. This is as true of the Capitalist/Soviet conflict as it is, say, of a game of chess.

For example, the Rand Corporation defined the entire Cuban missile crisis in terms of four outcomes: a draw (where both sides compromised) a victory for the Soviets (where the missiles stayed in Cuba) a victory for the United States (where a US air strike took out the missiles but the Soviets did not retaliate) and, finally, a mutual loss situation (nuclear war).

WIN-WIN OUTCOME?

Each outcome was given a score of 1 to 4 for each participant (1 bad, 4 good). So, all-out nuclear destruction was 1,1, the Soviet win was 2,4, the US win was 4,2. And compromise was 3,3. The Rand Corporation was able to predict, therefore, that a compromise would take place as this was the only really win-win situation for both participants. This is indeed what happened: the Soviets removed their missiles in exchange for a presidential guarantee that Cuba would not be invaded.

Proof that understanding gameplay saved us all from frying? Not really: the Rand Corporation had nothing to do with the Kennedy-Kruschev negotiations. Still, the Pentagon took its advice even more seriously thereafter, and much of the US policy in the Vietnam War came straight from Rand's Santa Monica headquarters.

The result is that game theory is now rather discredited (American commanders in the field were often told to count civilian casualties as Viet-Cong to fit with Rand's mathematical predictions).

Most observers now agree that Rand's attempt to plot human behaviour by mathematical means was a classic case of confusing the neat map with the chaotic territory - leading to a downward spiral of false projections.

Still, the bare fact that human behaviour is identical in game and 'real' situations remains an important lesson. Perhaps we shouldn't ask why we play games, but what would happen if we ever stopped playing them

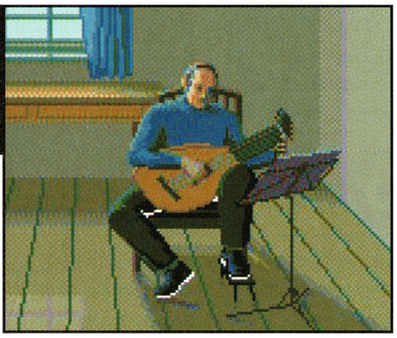
Barry Ryan's top five of all time

Here's five of my own personal all time favourites, games which turned me into a gibbering wreck, deprived me of my sanity, well being and social skills but which still managed to leave me panting for more.

1 THE MAGNETIC SCROLLS TEXT ADVENTURES

PUBLISHER: RAINBIRD.

Text adventures are, for me, some of the best games ever to grace the PC. In terms of immersion, depth, difficulty and sheer addictive playability, very few other genres come close.



Right: The Guild of Thieves: in-game location shots break up text

These games are what you, the gamer, make of them because the visual landscape of the game resides only in your own fevered imagination. No two gamers' mental map of, say, The Guild of Thieves or The Pawn will be the same. Text-based adventures do not insult your intelligence — in fact, they are positively predicated on the theory that the individual who buys the game possesses a fair amount of grey matter and the ability to use it. In an era where gaming by numbers has become endemic, this uncompromising stance is hard to believe. Text adventures were genuinely games written by gamers for gamers. They are the closest thing to a pure computer gaming experience you can get. I've chosen the Magnetic Scrolls series because it represented the high point of the text adventure before its slow slide into gaming oblivion.

2 SYNDICATE

PUBLISHER: BULLFROG

With the current penchant for squad-based tactical shooters, we tend to forget that the genre has been around for quite some time in many guises. Bullfrog's Syndicate is undoubtedly the best example I've encountered. You can have your Commandos and you can keep your Shadow Company. You can even hold onto Rainbow Six and Hidden & Dangerous. This is the best example of the genre, bar none. It's got atmosphere in

▶▶

Why I play games...

Barry Ryan

I've been playing games for as long as I care to remember. My first games machine was an Atari 2600, complete with wooden fascia and clunky Classic Star Trek style switches.

Looking back, it's almost scary to reflect on how far the games industry has come since those early days. But the simple ingredients which go to create a great game have, thankfully, remained unchanged, and that's why after all these years I still keep coming back for more.

To be a player of games, I think you've got to be prepared to suspend your disbelief and actively allow yourself to be drawn into the alternate worlds created by games developers. You've got to deliberately seek that escape, that complete immersion in another world, which all the truly great games have offered down the years. It's a two way street: the games creator will attempt to sell you his vision, but you've got to buy into it.

This symbiosis between gamers and developers is one of the least commented upon aspects of the games industry. One of the most disturbing gaming developments over recent years has been the mistaken assumption that if a game looks wonderful, and tests all the latest pieces of technological gubbins to destruction, it's got to be a classic.

Thankfully, that's not the way it works — otherwise how would you explain the success of some of the best games of the last few years? Games like Civilisation, The Close Combat series, Elite, Age of Empires and Syndicate all go to show that gamers will always demand something more.

What is that 'something', this X-factor which makes a game a classic? If I knew the answer to that one, I'd be ensconced in a palatial penthouse in Los Angeles with seven Ferraris, one for each day of the week, parked in the garage.

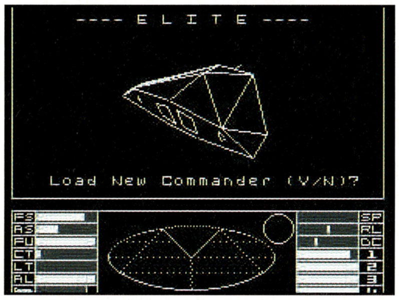
I know it when I see it, though; and every so often, just when I've reached my own personal breaking point with the mounds of sub-standard, derivative tat and drivel peddled by large sectors of the games industry, along comes a game which slaps me in the face, kicks me where the sun don't shine and ruins my life for weeks on end.

buckets, great weapons, fantastic gamescapes and, to top it all, it's devilishly, insanely difficult. If I had to choose one game to take with me to a desert island hideaway this would be it.

3 ELITE

PUBLISHER: FIREBIRD

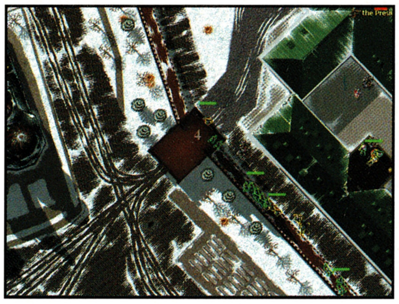
This was the first game which fully explored the possibilities of completely open ended non-linear gameplay. The sense of freedom and endless possibility was a heady rush. I still can't comprehend how such a vast gameworld was shoehorned into some of the antiquated wrecks on which it premiered (the 48K Spectrum, for example). It was the first space trading game which really worked and as far as I'm concerned it's still in a minority of one. It's had a number of pale imitators but none have even come close to duplicating its winning formula. Many's the hour I spent bashing away on the rubber keys of my old Spectrum on this one.

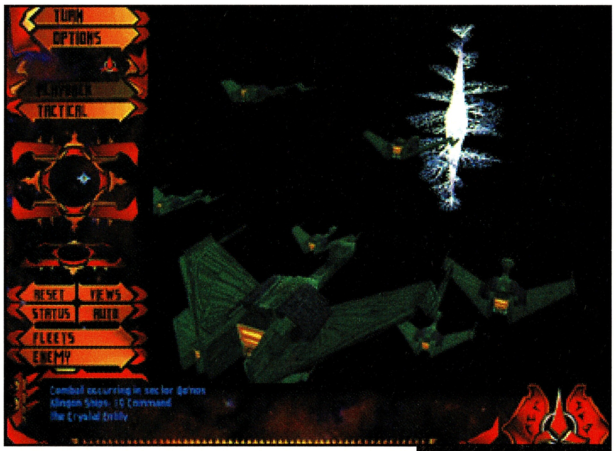


4 CLOSE COMBAT III: THE RUSSIAN FRONT

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT

Close Combat III was the game which turned me back on to serious wargaming. Over the years I had played Talonsoft's Battleground series and a whole host of other 2D hex-driven wargames. After a while I began to feel that, worthy as these games may have been, they were stuck in an evolutionary dead end and offered nothing new. Then I happened upon Close Combat III. Now, I had played the other two games in the series but I felt that they didn't quite manage to get the difficult mix of Real Time Strategy and hard-core wargame just right. Close Combat III, however, hit the nail on the head and is definitely one of the best wargames I've ever had the good fortune to play. It effortlessly combines the cerebral with the visceral and is a much better game than the recently released Close Combat IV: Battle of the Bulge (even though I did enjoy the latter).



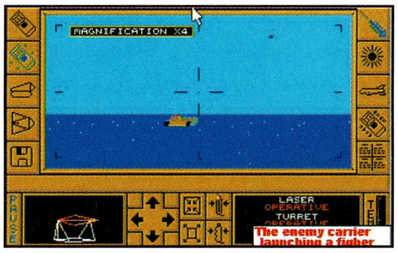


Above: Birth of the Federation – Klingons on the starboard bow

5 CARRIER COMMAND

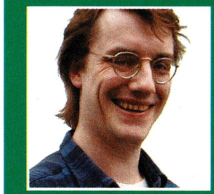
RAINBIRD

Carrier Command was a real benchmark game. It was the game which finally combined strategic and tactical gameplay elements with resource management, first person perspectives, and a vast gameplaying arena. In terms of graphics it was revolutionary and pushed the technology of the time to its limits. In essence, it was Homeworld done a decade ago, only more addictive, more plausible and far more demanding. You had to command your carrier force, your ground and air forces and defend your island empire simultaneously. Enemy AI was positively fiendish. This game was so far ahead of its time that it beggars belief. So it warmed the cockles of my heart to note recently that somebody is hard at work developing an updated version of the game off his own bat.



Why I play games...

Damon Wilson



There's a reason I don't speak French. It's nothing to do with laziness, natural stupidity or English jingoism (although these will certainly have played their part) – the reason is an obsession with the future of computer gaming. For three years, between the ages of eleven and thirteen (when I dropped the subject) I would sit on the back row of the French class and discuss possible computer games with a boy called Tansley. Never in other lessons, just French.

"How about Battlezone, but with all the tanks looking filled-in and real?" we'd whisper. "Or a 3D asteroids where you're sitting in a cockpit and everything! Or how about a Star Wars game, but where you can run about shooting storm troopers?"

Who had time for learning languages with grand topics like that to consider?

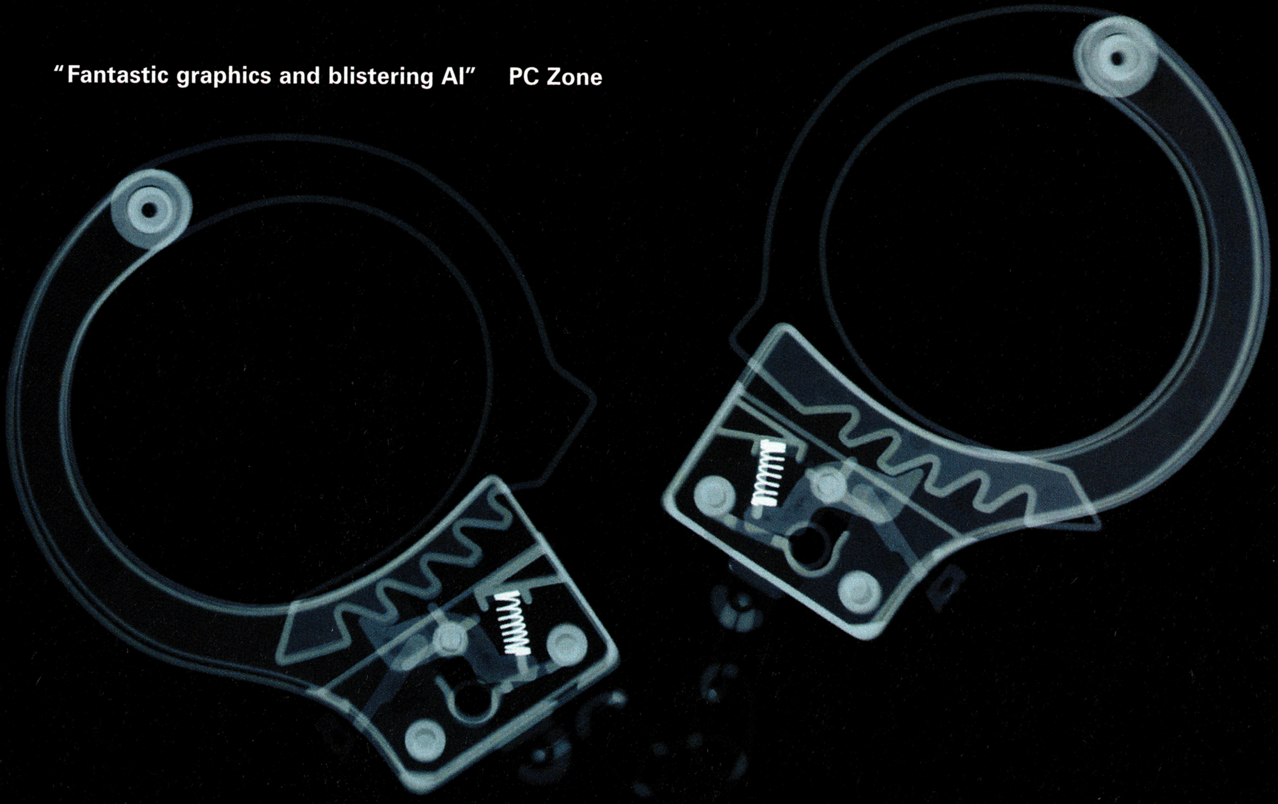
Then, over the past twenty-years, I've seen almost all of our suggestions come true or, as often as not, surpassed. Rather than talking to French people in their own language, I have passed my free time playing computer game after computer game with an increasing sense of child-like wonder. The computer games industry has done the impossible – outstripped the fevered imagination of teenage boys. It's like finding out that Aladdin's cave is not only real, but is actually accessible from a shop on the high street (Mr Ben, eat your heart out.)

Sensible friends have often pointed-out to me that computer games are not real – that devoting a large proportion of my life to them is the modern equivalent to 'bein' away wit' th' fairies.'

In defence, I used to have to fall back on the historical fact that this is just what a lot of sensible people said about novels when they first became widely popular in the eighteenth century. Of course, in recent years I have been able to look smug when my hobby is criticised, and can point-out that the computer games industry is already more profitable than Hollywood and looks to become bigger than television in the next decade. For a lot of people, myself included, computer games are not only endless fun, but are the providers of the daily bread and butter.

THE TRIGGER-HAPPY NEED NOT APPLY

“Fantastic graphics and blistering AI” PC Zone



“Unbelievably, it’s even more realistic than the rest of its mini-genre” PC Gamer

SWAT 3

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THE ULTIMATE 3D SQUAD-BASED TACTICAL COMBAT SIMULATION

Take command of a five-man entry team utilising stealth and dynamic tactics

Choose mission or career mode, set within stunning real-life L.A. locations

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Why I play games...

Mark Shaw

The image of the gamesplayer as a fat, lonely obsessive with little sexual experience and an aversion to sunlight is false – I'm not fat, for a start. Ever since taking on my friend Joe at Jet Set Willy on his VIC 20, gaming has been a social experience for me. Periods of my life can be characterised by the people that I knew and the games that I played with them.

When I should have been revising for GCSEs, I was playing Civilisation with my best friend James. A-levels? Titanic struggles with my brother Jonn and his minions at Super Mario Cart. University was all about drunken, late-night Micro Machines 2 tournaments with Euan, JD and Simon.

More recently, though, I've found myself playing games alone — my MA suffered as a result of chronic SimCity 2000 addiction, a game I played in solitude, while current flavour of the month Championship Manager 3 is another solitary vice (although every so often I get an appreciative crowd watching).

Forthcoming online multiplayer games such as Allegiance and 10Six hold a lot of promise, however — if they succeed in combining that certain something shared by the best games with that chance of real social interaction.

Strategy games reward the development of your own individual approach, and the games that I prefer allow more than just a modicum of self-expression.

When I manage a team in Champ Man 3, I want it to play my way – admittedly, usually the wrong way. I have my own hit-and-fade style in Rogue Spear, my own vision for a blossoming SimCity, plans for networks in Railroad Tycoon 2 that would put Connex to shame.

The best games ask more of you than simply to guess what the programmer happened to be thinking one day and so work out the right answer ('move to the left of the screen. Grab the vine. Swing').

I want to be a hero, to do on screen what I can't hope to do in life: visit the stars, rule a kingdom, take the mighty Liverpool all the way to the cup... What I don't want is to feel like the last man on a production line.

Damon Wilson's top five of all time

My five favourite PC strategy games of all time? Fifty favourite would be more like it, but here, for what it's worth, are the five games I would recommend you really have a go at if you haven't done so already.

1 LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

PUBLISHER: DOMARK

This is a bit of a cheat as it was originally a ZX Spectrum game, and was only ported to the PC as a free additional item to the ill-fated Lords of Midnight III.

The original Lords of Midnight, released in 1982 by Mike Singleton, was the first 3D strategy game. The player took command of a group of heroes and moved them individually through a slide-show, but remarkably convincing, world. Armies had to be recruited, enemies fought and the evil Icelord, Doomdark, defeated. It may all seem tame by today's standards but, trust me, given some suspension of disbelief it can be a great bit of fun.

Original PC conversion programmer, Christopher Jon Wild, is presently working on the Windows/Linux conversion in his spare time. The DOS version of Lords of Midnight, and the much bigger and more difficult sequel, Doomdark's Revenge, are available for free download on his www.icemark.com website.

2 UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN

PUBLISHER: MICROPROSE

Another oldie: the Gollop Brothers' classic isometric, squad-based combat game that set the standard (and in my opinion has yet to be surpassed). On the RTS strategic level, you build anti-UFO bases around the planet, conduct research and intercept alien ships bent on covert evil. On the turn-based tactical level, you move a squad across UFO crash sites, fighting and killing or capturing the alien survivors. A grim plot unfolds and the tension in the fighting sequences sometime reaches heart-failure point.

Right: UFO: Enemy Unknown – sometimes heart-stopping

If I had to pick one favourite game above all others, UFO (AKA X-Com 1) would be it. (Recently re-released, packaged with its four sequels and clocked to run on modern PCs in the Microprose X-Com Collection.)

3 THIEF

PUBLISHER: EIDOS

Now for a bit of controversy. Many would deny that Thief is a strategy game at all. The player creeps about a 3D medieval, steam-punk world and steals things: where's the strategy in that?

Well, maybe not much in the way of tactical engagements, but I'd argue that anything than demands this level of hard-thinking and downright animal cunning is as cerebrally demanding as taking on Deep Blue (the super chess computer). Each level offers multiple routes to the loot and many tricky problems have to be thought-around to achieve the mission goals. Also one of the few games that will fail you if you kill anyone: very laudable.

4 HIDDEN & DANGEROUS

PUBLISHER: TAKE 2

More 3D, first-person fun, but this time very certainly a strategy game. Lead a unit of WW II SAS men behind enemy lines and annoy the Nazis (those that you leave alive, that is). A clever, in-mission overview allows the player to plot tactics on the fly and the fighting demands caution and cleverness more than gung-ho heroics. A very difficult game to complete, but so atmospheric and well designed that replaying missions is a positive pleasure. Have a look at the player's guide further on in this issue to get a taste of what is demanded from would-be Axis-smashers.

5 STAR TREK: BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION

PUBLISHER: MICROPROSE

A space empire game with everything you could want. Diplomacy with strange alien races, huge 3D battles, giant space monsters and the option to play the bad-guys from the TV shows. Even the people who hate Star Trek can enjoy this game because none of the numerous stars from the show(s) even make a cameo appearance.

A cleverly demanding game, as the player

has to act in character for whichever race they choose (Mother Teresa for the Federation, Ghengis Khan for the Klingons, Goebbels for the Cardassians, Blofeld for the Romulans and Fagin for the Ferengi). My only gripe about the game is that Paramount's labyrinthine Star Trek franchising system did not allow the inclusion of any ships from the original series, which surely would be seen at the birth of the Federation.

Mark Shaw's top five of all time

1

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3

PUBLISHER: EIDOS

Although some would argue that the third instalment of the Championship Manager series has too much in common with its immediate predecessor, as far as I'm concerned it's much the better game. The databases of footballer statistics have swelled and the game interface is more intuitive. But the biggest change is the removal of the killer tactic – a particular formation that dramatically increased your chances of success in Champ Man 2 which ups the ante and levels the playing field. Utterly immersive, utterly compulsive, Championship Manager 3 is one of the few football games that even appeals to non-football fans. Proof positive that playability counts for much more than fancy graphics.

2

SIMCITY 2000

PUBLISHER: MAXIS/EA

Although I played and enjoyed the original SimCity, it was SimCity 2000 that, for some reason, captured my imagination. I would never have believed that I'd become obsessed with a game about building cities, but it gave free rein to my imagination – the virgin soil upon which city is to be built is a blank canvas on which not just any city but MY city will take shape and grow. The open-ended nature of the game means that it's the player who makes the choices and sets the rules according to mood, personality and whim. More than a boost to the imagination, SimCity allows players to express their individuality and make a personal stamp on the game.

Right: Oh, the New Jerusalem – the dreaming spires of SimCity

3

RAILROAD TYCOON 2

PUBLISHER: HASBRO

A genuine exercise for the mind, Railroad Tycoon 2 provides a stern challenge and a great deal of satisfaction when a gold medal is awarded for a hard-fought success. Like most of the games on this page, the game has great depth, longevity and playability, but it also demands that you use the old grey matter – without brains, you're lost. It's a tribute to the developer that, although so many different elements need to be balanced to create an efficient and profitable rail network, it manages to deliver genuine thrills and makes you feel like more than a glorified accountant.

4

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION

PUBLISHER: MICROPROSE

The original game in this franchise is an all-time classic, and perhaps the first "true" strategy games I ever played on the PC. I may be looking at this through rose-tinted spectacles, but the quaint top-down map, its simplistic town management arrangement and even more simplistic combat system remind me of simpler, somehow purer gaming experiences. Revolutionary for its time, for me there's still something magical about the game. I know it's been done better in terms of AI, graphics and even the game system but it has a charm and character that few have managed to replicate.

5

RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR

PUBLISHER: RED STORM

It really doesn't get any better than this gloriously playable game. Rogue Spear represents the best of modern strategy gaming; few other games offer the same amount of tension or require such decision-making prowess. I love its seamless blend of action and adrenaline, tactics and thinking. I may be fantasising here, but this game makes me think and act like I feel a soldier would, approaching each potentially lethal situation with planning and forethought rather than a big gun and a deathwish. Best of all, it allows strategy gamers to play first person shooters without feeling like we've had to check our brains at the door. PCSG.

Why I play games...

Martin Croft

I was first introduced to wargaming at the age of 10, and spent much of the next few years pushing 20mm Airfix ACW armies about a table-top. Deep down, however, I knew that there was something missing: the battles my best friend and I were fighting were set-piece affairs, arranged in a very gentlemanly manner: "We'll have eight regiments of infantry, two of cavalry and three batteries apiece. Now let's agree on the battlefield... Oh, and we'll have to stop at 5.00pm sharp for tea."

It all had more in common with warfare in 17th and 18th century Europe than with the confused nature of the American Civil War. Where was the strategic element? The first real use of railways in warfare? The dominance of the sea-lanes enjoyed by the Union? The sordid guerrilla campaign fought in Kansas and Missouri? The politics of the whole war? And above all, where was the Fog of War? Oh, and why did we have to spend so long arguing over what the rules say?

Later exposure to board wargaming, which allowed us to take a step back and look at the strategic level, helped answer some of these questions. But even so, I knew that there were elements of the real thing that we were still missing.

I wanted to know as much as I could about the reasons a battle or war was fought; I wanted to know about the generals; I wanted to understand the mentality of the ordinary soldiers; I wanted to know about the weapons used; I wanted to be able to explore what would happen if I did this, or this unit arrived late...

The computer appeared to offer a solution to many of the problems I was having with wargaming. No more arguing over rules (the computer was always right), no more having someone to act as umpire so we could simulate Fog of War, the ability to include a huge range of different variables – and, of course, the potential to have a battle when no real human opponent was available. And, with the best game titles, more background information than I could ever possibly digest, including artwork, maps, authentic music even.

Reviews

The editorial team at PC Strategy Games is passionate about strategy games – those titles where you have to think about the situation you're in, assess the resources available to you and then plan what you're going to do to achieve whatever the objectives are.

Because we are only covering the strategy genre, we are able to devote more time and more space to in-depth reviews of the latest titles in the area. As you'll see from the following pages, if we think a game is worth reviewing, then it won't be covered in less than two pages – and a major new game will get much more coverage. We believe that a game that's taken 18 months or more to develop deserves better than to be dismissed in a half page or less.

p50
Officer
Element Leaders
Main Menu
Squad Select

LAST NAME: Magnum
FIRST NAME: Harry
NICKNAME: "Wizard"
YEARS IN SWAT: 23
RACE: Black
PERSONALITY: Gung-Ho

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PCSG Reviews Panel

Martin Croft has been a war gamer, board gamer and role playing gamer for 30 years, the last 15 on computers. He spent the last three years as strategy games editor for a leading PC games magazine.

Favourite PC strategy game:
Master of Orion II

Damon Wilson has written and edited non-fiction books for the past 12 years. The vast majority of his books are about murder and the paranormal, and gaming has been the only sane thing in his life...

Favourite PC strategy game:
UFO: Enemy Unknown

Barry Ryan has degrees in archaeology and post-colonial literature, and for the last few years has spent his spare time – when not playing computer games – scrabbling about in Irish peat bogs.

Favourite PC strategy game:
Rogue Spear

Mark Shaw (not the singer from the mid-1980s one-hit wonder Then Jericho) is an expert on noodle music, databases, and friendly fire incidents. He also likes business and management games.

Favourite PC strategy game:
SimCity 2000

The PCSG Scoring System

THERE ARE TWO ELEMENTS TO THE PCSG SCORING SYSTEM

First, every game is given a score out of 10 by each of the three reviewers. These individual scores can be found at the top of the comments boxes. An overall score out of 10 is then calculated by averaging the three reviewers scores and then rounding to the nearest half point. This is the score out of 10 which appears in the 'Verdict' box printed at the end of each review.

Because we have three reviewers, games are unlikely to receive very high or very low final scores. A score of 10/10 will be almost impossible to achieve, while 9/10 should be considered a very high score indeed.

We've also added a simple thumbs up or thumbs down icon, to give you an instant idea of what we thought of each title.

Also in the verdict box, you will find a series of 'thermometers' which indicate how our reviewers rated the game on particular aspects (which are explained more fully below). These scores do not contribute to the overall score. Instead, they are merely meant to serve as a visual device to help the reader grasp quickly the main plus and minus points of each game. In almost all cases, the further to the right the red line is, the better: the exception is complexity, where the further to the right, the more difficult the learning curve is.

EXPLANATION OF THE CATEGORIES

Graphics – the look of the game, from cut scenes and full motion videos through management screens to the details of the terrain and individual units.

Sound f/x – specifically the in-game sound effects.

Music – any music which is featured, whether it is in-game or whether it plays during intro sequences, loading sequences, FMVs etc.

Challenge – how hard the game is to play, in terms of the tasks which the player has to achieve.

Realism – how authentic is the game to real life (or, in the case of games set in fantasy or science fiction worlds, how immersive is the gameplay).

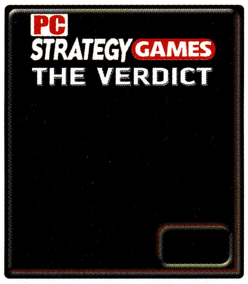
Complexity – how easy is it to learn how to play the game. Is there a good tutorial, does the manual clearly set things out, is there a decent help facility?

Interface – how easy is it to actually play the game, in terms of moving through information screens and giving orders. Is the information presented clearly? Also covers the amount of mouse and/or keyboard work required.

Multiplay – what's the multiplay experience like? How many people can get involved at once, and how easy is it for them to link up?

Gameplay – in the opinion of our team of three reviewers, just how much fun is the game to play?

AI – how do computer-controlled opponents rate? Are they predictable and easy to beat, or can they surprise a human player? Also covers 'autopilot' settings which allow a player to, for example, leave cities with orders to build defensively or offensively.



Ian Delaney works for another magazine, writing about laptops and handheld computers. Proud owner of a Sinclair Spectrum as a child, he still misses the feel of the rubber keys beneath his fingers.

Favourite PC strategy game:
Syndicate

Having spent three years studying rocks, Austin Parsons then put his skills to use in the computer games industry. In 1997, he started work as a quality assurance tester for a well-known UK manufacturer of strategy games.

Least favourite PC strategy game:
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun

Definitions

Action game. Games where the player is in direct control of an individual and sees what that individual sees. This category would include titles such as Red Storm's Rogue Spear or Sierra's SWAT.

Building game. A game in which the player takes responsibility for creating and maintaining a social structure – anything from a single building to an amusement park to an entire city.

Business game. A game which simulates running a business, such as Monte Christo's StartUp, Hasbro Interactive's Rollercoaster Tycoon or Airport Inc.

Classic game. A PC version of an existing board or card game, such as Chess, Bridge, Monopoly or Risk. Usually, the PC version is as close to the original as possible.

Empire building game. Those games where the player takes the role of the leader of a tribe or race. Usually covers a wide historical time-frame, and includes exploration, diplomacy and conflict.

God game. A game in which the player assumes god-like powers, usually to create a tribe, race or entire world. For example, Lionhead's Black and White, Bullfrog's Populous.

RPG (Role Playing Game) A game in which the player controls individuals, not entire armies. Usually, RPGs feature some element of progression, in that characters 'learn' between adventures or missions.

RTS (Real Time Strategy). In RTS games, players have to make decisions and give orders in 'real time', and units then attempt to carry out those orders. In a sense, time becomes another resource.

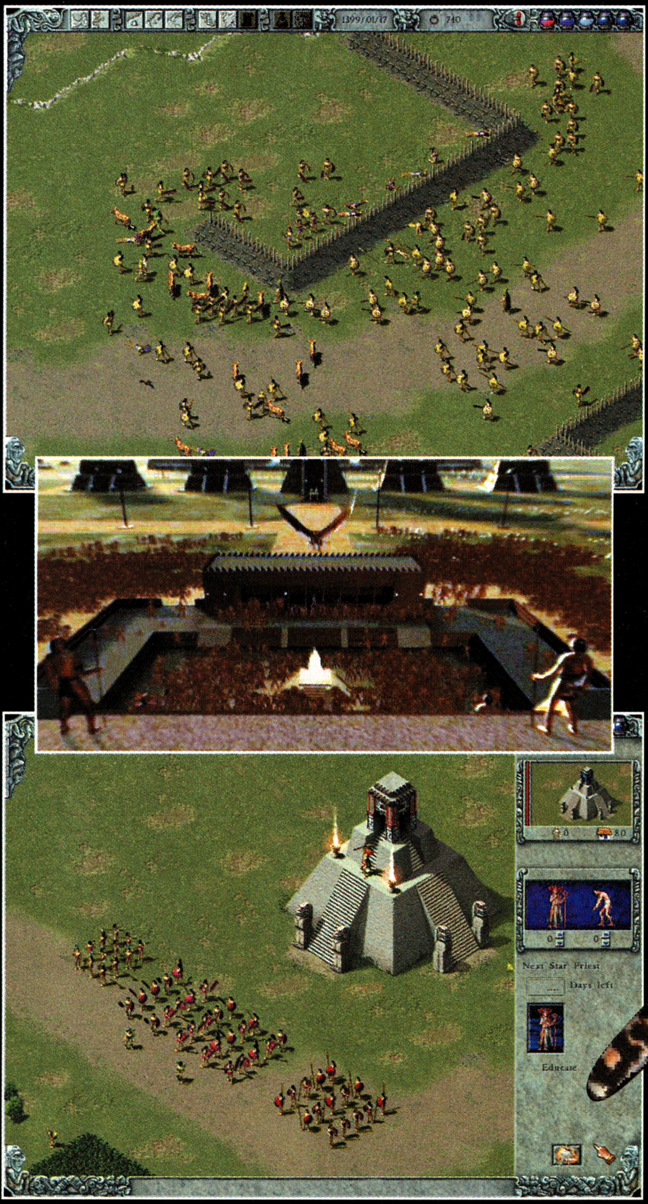
Sports management game. Titles where the player has to perform the activities of the manager of a sports team, including both financial and 'on the pitch' decisions.

War game. Titles which seek to simulate what happened in a particular battle or war. Often, PC wargames will be heavily based on existing table-top or board wargames – eg Talonsoft's Rising Sun

DEVELOPER: PHILOS LABORATORIES **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium 200 MHz • Win 95/98 • 10x CD-ROM • 32 Mb RAM • 200 Mb Hard Drive space • 1Mb Video Card • DirectX version 6.2/Linux

Theocracy

***Damon Wilson** puts on his feathered cape and explores the complex culture of the Aztecs, a people who really knew how to put their heart into things*



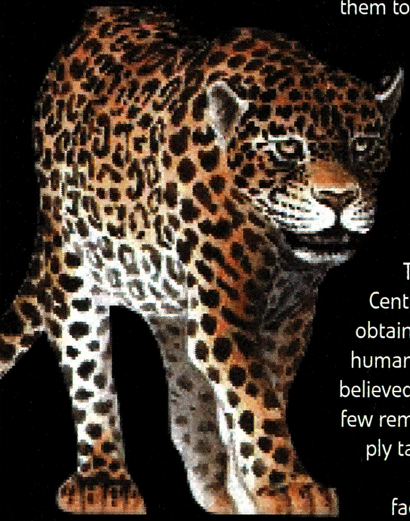
Opposite: The game features some beautiful renders, like this sun priest

Left: Fight your battles and butcher your sacrificial victims – but there's no in-game gore

The Aztec Empire and the Spanish Conquistadors: two of the most unpleasant warring factions in history. The Conquistadors were the archetype of the heartless, oppressive and religiously hypocritical European empire-builders. The Aztecs were a ruthless, warmongering nation who slaughtered dozens, sometimes hundreds of people every day to appease their cruel gods. You might say that the loss of either group could have only enriched mankind, but Philos Laboratories, Hungarian designers of Theocracy, disagree.

While admitting the horror of the Aztec religion, Philos essentially feel that the bad guys (in other words, the Conquistadors) won. It's certainly true that the Aztecs apparently had a beautiful and complex culture, resembling those Eden-civilisation episodes in Star Trek (if you ignore the savage wars and all those unnecessary open-heart operations.) Unfortunately, thanks to the deliberate destruction wrought by the Conquistadors – and despite a Renaissance in Central American archaeology in recent years – most of the subtleties of the Aztec culture have been lost to history.

It was, in fact, this void of knowledge that drew Philos to the fall of the Aztec Empire when the company were looking for a subject for a historical empire-building game. It allowed them to wing it on small details - such as the names of tribal leaders, minor aspects of the Aztec economy and details of their religion. It also allowed them to add whole levels of what we would normally call fantasy, like a magic system, trained combat-jaguars and the odd dragon here and there.



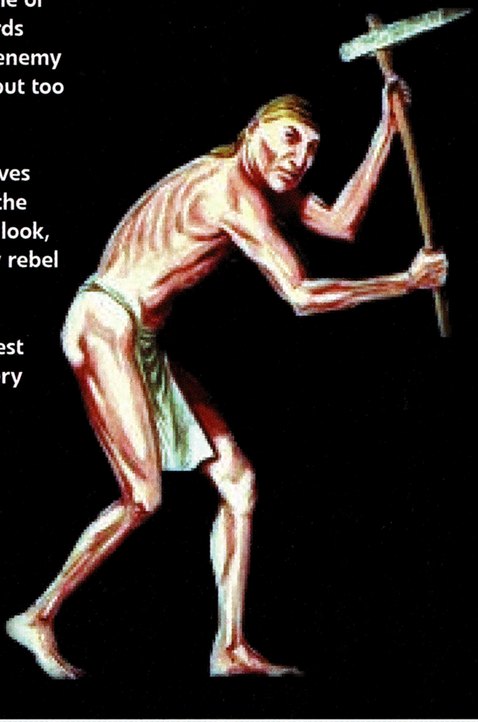
If this sounds like a dumbing-down of a serious historical conflict, don't be put off. Philos has been working on this game for almost four years, and have created a believable, if occasionally fantastic, game world. In Theocracy they suggest that the peoples of Central America were adept with magic, which they obtained from their bloodthirsty gods in return for human sacrifices. Certainly, this is what the Aztecs believed themselves, as far as we can tell from their few remaining myths and histories, so Philos has simply taken them at their word.

If you are wondering how this rather striking fact escaped the invading Europeans, ▶▶

Below: One of your guards spots an enemy archer – but too late!

Right: Slaves give you the odd dirty look, but rarely rebel

Opposite: A star priest in his finery



Others to watch out for

Theocracy is at heart a fairly conventional empire-building real time strategy game, but with some nice extra twists - particularly the magic system. If, after trying out the demo on the cover disk this month, playing the full game or just reading the article, you think you'd like to try out some of the other games it's like, then here's a few suggestions.

To begin with, of course, there's Age of Empires and its sequel, Age of Empires II: Age of Kings. If you're not familiar with Microsoft's classic RTS games, then you should immediately rush out and buy them (well, one of them at least).

As with Theocracy, you have to assign peasants to various resource collecting or building tasks, while the buildings they make can be used to create various military units to defend yourself or conquer enemy territory. Buildings are also an integral part of technological research – and keeping up in the arms race is absolutely vital if you are to win the game.

If you want to get a flavour for Age of Empires or AoEII, then there are various sites from which you can download a demo – or try and find a copy of PC Strategy Games April 2000 issue, because we carried a demo of AoEII on our cover disk (as well as an extensive strategy guide for it).

Another game which has much in common with Theocracy is Zablac's Tzar: Burden of the Crown, reviewed in the last issue. In some ways, it's closer to Theocracy than AoE is, because it also includes a series of 'missions' which have a very role playing flavour about them. And, as with Theocracy, it has a slightly different

Theocracy maintains that the presence of Christian priests nullified the Aztec priests' magic powers. Any fireball-throwing heathens would therefore have gone unobserved by Church representatives and would naturally have been stricken from European histories as foul heresy. This may seem a ropy piece of justification, but the game background is so thoroughly developed that even a sceptical player (as I was) finds it believable after only a short period of play.

Theocracy comes in two playable parts: the Chronicles and the Prophesy.

The Chronicles are a series of half-a-dozen scenarios, of increasing difficulty, which are basically aimed at breaking the player in to the often-complex gameplay. The first teaches the player how to move armies effectively, the next gives them a battle to win, and so forth, right up to a governing a small empire and completing the building of a huge pyramid. Here, again, the thoroughness of the background detail is in evidence; each scenario has an explanation of the action, presented as an Aztec fable. These, unfortunately, are invention on Philos' part, but they are well-written and draw the player into the mood quite effectively.

The Prophesy is the campaign aspect of Theocracy and is, to a minor extent, based on a known – if incredible – historical fact: the Aztecs believed that the Spanish invasion had been foretold, and that the Spaniards' leader, Hernan Cortez, was the reincarnation of the god Quetzalcoatl.

FEATHERED SERPENT

Aztec legend said that in the dawn of time the god of knowledge – Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent – was exiled over the ocean to the East. An ancient prophecy told that the god (or his followers) would return in a specific year: that year was, in Christian dating, 1519 AD – the year that Cortez struck into the Aztec Empire. The Theocracy campaign gives the player the task of uniting the five warring Aztec nations in time to repel the coming invader.

The Prophesy game starts in 1419 with the player controlling a single province that has broken away from a larger nation. They have only 100 years to use warfare and diplomacy to gain control of a large

Damon Wilson says... 9/10

For me, Theocracy automatically wins points on several levels. First and foremost, it is an empire-building game set in a previously untouched period of history and presents itself with both style and depth. It is very definitely not just another Age of Empires rip-off.

I was also very impressed by the simple and effective troop formation organiser and the impressive battles it allows the player to fight – something that we were promised in Age of Empires II, but never got. With any luck, this innovation will influence all future RTS games.

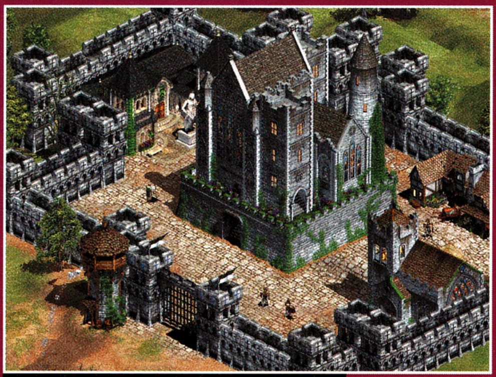
The magic system will undoubtedly annoy historically minded players, but it works well and the heroes and magic weapons add an occasional role-playing feel to the game.

The graphics are excellent on the province level and the fact that the individual units are easy to differentiate makes all the difference in frantic battles and tricky construction projects.

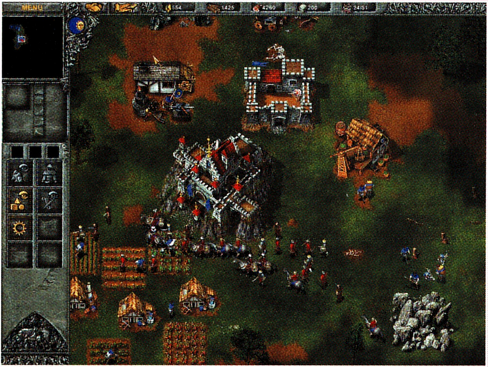
My only real gripes are the sometimes weak enemy AI and the fact that attacks on provinces take place in one fell swoop – you can't save your game during a battle, and if you pull back to the regional level for any reason you automatically lose. Aliens vs. Predator also tried this all-or-nothing approach, but everyone and his dog complained and the designer, Rebellion, was forced to put out a patch that allowed in-game saving. I agree that disallowing saves adds to the game tension, but who has the time to play a battle for an hour-and-a-half, only to have to go back to a previous, regional level save just because your vital hero got killed in the very last skirmish? Maybe Philos Laboratories will consider a patch as well...

All-in-all, an incredibly good game. You can see that Philos has actually been working on it hard for the last four years.

A near-perfect strategy game. If only the enemy AI had been better and you could save during battles – then it might have been a 10.



Age of Empires II: Age of Kings



Tzar: Burden of the Crown

approach to creating an RTS game, which may be due to the fact that Theocracy's developers are Hungarian, while Tzar's are Bulgarian. As a result, both seem to have a different slant on history, avoiding the Hollywood approach that many American-developed games seem to take.

Having said that, the look and feel of Tzar is so close to AoEII that if you've just bought the latter and you're still playing through it, you probably don't want to rush out and buy the former.

Other games which would provide much the same thrills as Theocracy include I-Magic's Seven Kingdoms, Blue Byte's Settlers series (Settlers III is just about to be launched in a special 'Gold Edition', complete with Quest of the Amazons and other extras), and Impressions' Lords of the Realm series.

proportion of the Central American provinces. With luck and leadership, they will then have enough resources and troops to smash the bearded invaders when they arrive with their shouting-sticks and big, hairless llamas (guns and horses).

The campaign, and the more difficult scenarios, are played on two planes, the province and regional levels; but most of the player's time is spent on the former, an isometric map of the main settlement of whichever of their provinces they happen to be organising. These consist of rolling green plains, crossed by roads and rivers, and scattered with large areas of swamp, jungle and rocky outcrops. Each province also starts with a few basic buildings and a population of slaves.

Slaves are the basic unit of Aztec culture. A number become available for work each month, as they reach maturity, and all Aztecs start-off as slaves. Slaves can do most forms of manual labour, but they do it badly. To stand anything like a chance of surviving, the player has to educate their slaves to various tasks, such as farming, lumberjacking, building and, of course, llama training. These specialists are produced in schools (which you will have to build) and can then be assigned to your farms, lumber-mills, building projects, llama stables and so forth. There are 21 specialities available, counting the five sub-schools of priest, so a complex society quickly evolves in each province that comes under your control.

Each specialist has its own distinctive sprite, so once you've set a province running smoothly, it is a positive pleasure to sit back for a while and watch the your people beaver away. You have all the time you want because uniquely for this type of game, time does not pass on the micro (province) level. Set-up as many building projects as you like and give your slaves bewildering streams of orders, but the sun will not set (and things won't start happening) until you go to the regional level and hit the unpause button.

The various types of building, as well as providing slave training, form the heart of your resource production. Wood is cut by lumberyards from verdant jungles (which unlike those in similar RTS empire-builders, do not diminish under the axe). Meat and corn come from everlasting farms. Building stone, jade and gold are mined, and these last two can be crafted into jewellery at the jewellers. Worked gems and gold were the money of the Aztecs, and no grand edifice can be completed without a crusting of fine-worked baubles.

A lot of thought has to be given to which of the 26 buildings you create in each province, as local resources and demands vary. Buildings don't demand upkeep once constructed but demolishing useless ones will not get back your precious resources. Also, timing is everything –

▶▶

YOU

THEM

WESTERN ALLIANCE FORCES ARE WEAK.
THE EASTERN COALITION ARE TAKING NO PRISONERS.

www.starlancer.co.uk

Martin Croft says... 9/10

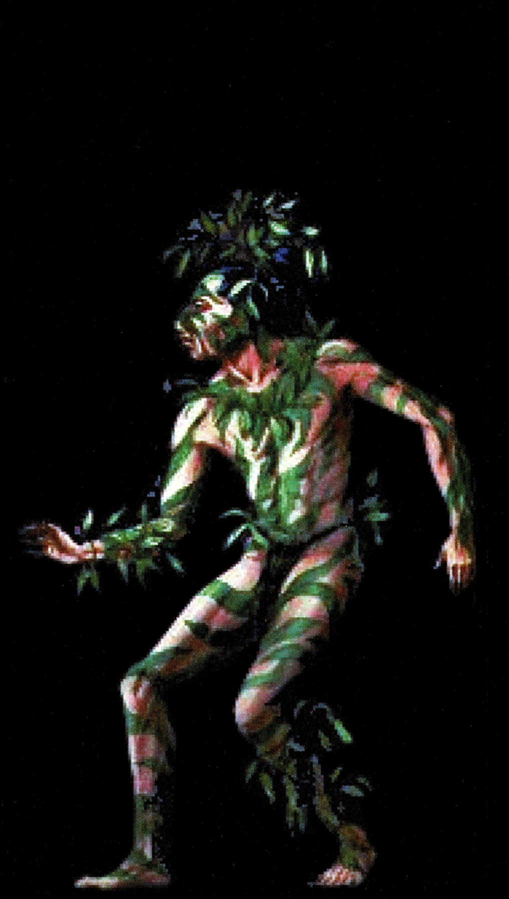
The story of the conquest of South America by little more than bandit bands of Spanish freebooters has always fascinated me, and Philos has produced a game which skilfully melds history and fantasy to create an exceptionally satisfying whole. Granted, the province management system can get a bit wearing after a while (some of the micro-management gets a bit repetitive), and the lack of a decent strategic multiplay option is annoying (I'd much rather take other players on on a diplomatic and resource management level than on the battlefield). But the way you handle units in battle makes up for a lot. AoEII promised we'd be allowed to control units in proper formations when fighting battles, but in fact everything just degenerated, the moment the enemy appeared, into a howling brawl. Theocracy, however, delivers, and if you've set up a unit of spearmen or archers, say, they'll actually try and stay in formation.

The combination of RTS-style combat and almost RPG-style mini-missions is a nice touch, and allows Philos to justify adding individual characters or heroes who can be given magic weapons.

The graphics are superb, and the way the Aztec priests dance around when they're casting their spells is a particularly nice graphic element. I spent some years studying native American history, and it's obvious that Philos has merged elements of Aztec culture, as drawn from the records of the Spanish Conquistadors, with existing rituals as performed by the Navajo and other tribes from North America.

The tutorial system also works very well, leading new players through what is in fact a very complex command and control system gently and effectively.

A brilliant RTS which takes the ideas set out in Age of Empires and moves them on to another level. Well worth the effort to learn the complex interface.



Abovet: **An Aztec scout, well camouflaged to blend into the rain forests**

for example, decide to build a large barracks or hospitals before you have enough farms, ranches or fishing huts and you will create a famine. Similarly, the decision about how many slaves to train to a profession, and when, can also be crucial: not enough builders will drag out building times, but so will not having enough lumberjacks, stone miners or jewellers...

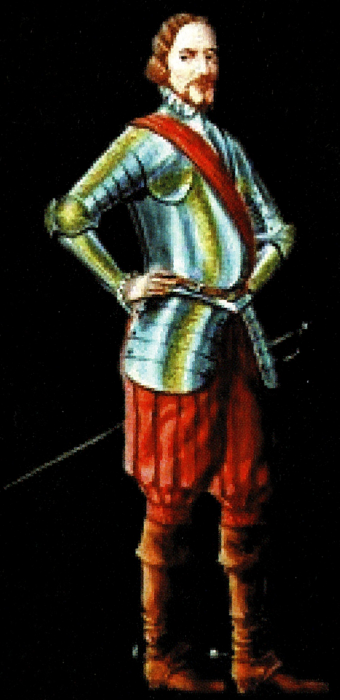
The height, if you will forgive the pun, of your construction ambitions are the pyramids; smaller than their Egyptian cousins, but better decorated. These cost a fortune in resources, but allow you to train priests - the magic-wielding shock-troops of the game. Pyramids also collect mana, the magical resource that fuels the spells. Of course, if you find yourself in a fix, and the trickle of mana provided by your pyramids won't get you out of the mess, you will need to sacrifice a slave or two for a mana boost.

Perhaps we should note here that Philos Laboratories are well aware that human sacrifice in a computer game will upset some sections of the public. Accordingly, they have minimised this aspect as much as is historically practicable, and all the heart removals are done out of the player's view, inside the pyramid temples. A victory for morality and good taste (dammit).

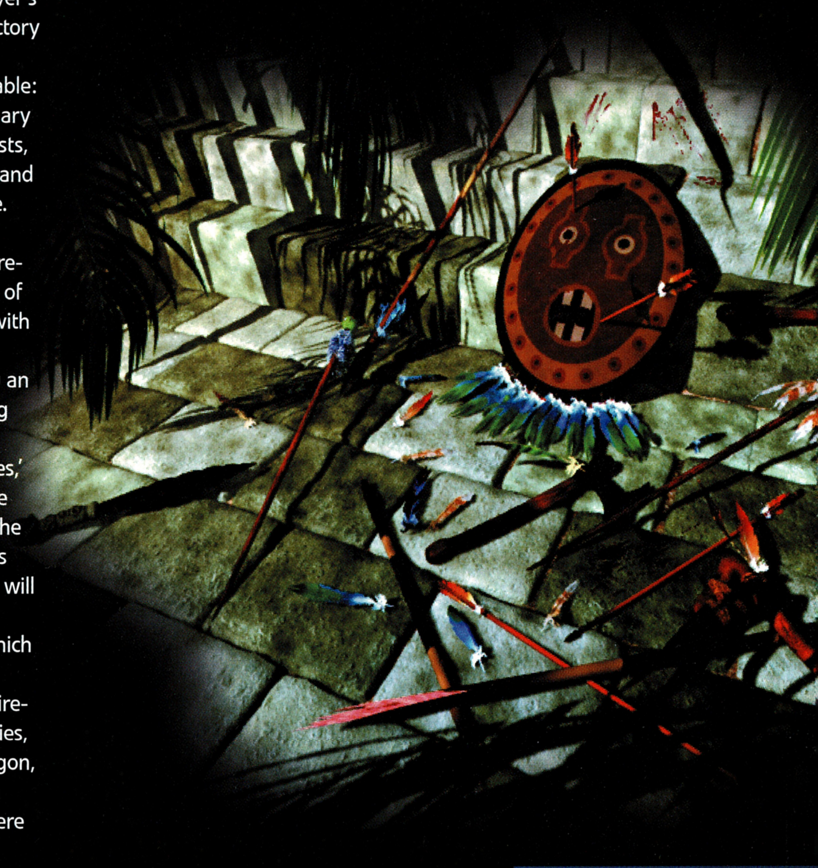
There are 10 types of pyramid available: two for each of the five religions. Ordinary pyramids can educate slaves to be priests, draw a little daily mana from the gods and allow you to indulge in human sacrifice. Low Priests can cast the weaker four of their creed's spells, but if you want to create a High Priest (who can throw all six of his cult's spells) you will need a priest with some battle experience and a High Pyramid – which will naturally cost you an arm, a leg and a number of still-beating hearts to construct.

There are five Aztec religious 'spheres,' each attached to a god. Foremost of the Aztec deities is Cardezalca, the God of the Sun, and he gives six holy powers to his priests. The lowest is Sacred Fire, which will cause a single victim to spontaneously combust. Next is Arms of the Father, which protects the priest from physical harm. Third is Daemon Ball, which is a giant fireball that roasts a whole group of enemies, and the fourth spell is Cloud of the Dragon, which turns the indicated fighter into a superhero for a few minutes. Finally there are the two higher spells, attainable only by High Priests: Flash of the Sun, which will temporally blind all the enemies in a province (reducing their fighting skill) and Ring of Flame which is the Aztec version of a battlefield nuke.

I have listed all the Sun religion spells in detail because the other four deities – gods of the Moon, Star, Nature and Soul – offer much the same sort of thing. The first spell of the Star cult, for example, freezes victims



Below left: **Hernan Cortes – arrogant Spaniard, or Quetzalcoatl come back to his people?**



rather than burns them, the second also protects the priest, and so forth. Each god offers one or two speciality spells (invisibility for Moon priests, healing for Nature etc), but since each sphere costs the same amount to attain and the spells have much the same effect, the difference is more one of personal style than real effect.

Of course, having read this far, you may be wondering what Theocracy offers over similar RTS empire games. The answer is the region map level and the combat. On the regional map the player not only controls the flow of time, but also decides which provinces to trade with, which nations to make diplomatic alliances with and who to attack.

This certainly seems to put it above AoE II – which was just a series of linked missions – but is actually less impressive than it could have been. Diplomacy only allows the player either to bribe to make friends or flatly declaring war. The building of trade caravans is interesting, but since you can only move resources about within you own empire, and you can't actually barter with allies, 'trade' is a misleading word: resupply is more accurate.

But it is the combat that marks Theocracy above its competitors. For a start, there is no limit to the number of troops at your command (other than the slow-down effect hundreds of sprites will have on your PC). The troop command interface is as simple and effective as we have come to demand in this sort of RTS, but with an important difference: you can design your own troop formations (on the fly, as often as not) and the little devils actually try to hold these in battle.

There are just four types of basic fighting unit (commanders, obsidian swordsmen, spearmen and archers) but the different types of priest, the heroes (earned by conquering certain provinces) and the dozens of magic weapons to be won, allow unique and varied armies to be created.

The terrain also plays a big part in the fighting – especially the jungle areas that allow effective hit-and-fade tactics. Set-piece battles are not only possible, but are occasionally demanded, and intelligent generalship often turns the tide against numerical superiority.

This aspect is, admittedly, most notable in the multiplay games (which are just straight fights for a province, without the regional level of play). The computer AI of single player enemies is only average, I'm afraid. Still, the four years of development which have gone into the project certainly show in Theocracy. It is a complex and deeply researched game that draws the player into the Aztec world.

Mark Shaw says... 8/10

The place of Age of Empires in the history of strategy games is an interesting one. In synthesising many of the core characteristics of other civilisation building games and of RTS, Microsoft set a new standard of gaming that also captured the imagination of both the games playing public and the games development sector. Theocracy is the latest in a long line of projects that bears more than a superficial resemblance to its predecessor. Fortunately, although a number of obvious comparisons can be drawn between the two games, Philos has not paid too much respect to what has become the (unofficial, at least) template for all empire-building games developed since it first hit the shelves. Microsoft's best seller appears to have been nothing more than a departure point - the four years that were apparently spent designing, developing and programming Theocracy were not wasted. It's obvious that Philos hopes to push the genre on, as Theocracy is a richer, more complex and more satisfying beast even than AoE 2. Theocracy, in fact, manages to deliver on some of that games' unfulfilled promises - in-formation fighting for a start (and a handy formation builder), a more complex technological tree and a vast array of units and buildings. The magic option (which refreshingly treats humans as another natural resource, ripe for sacrifice) is another definite plus. Although the general aim of the game is to resist Spain's brutal attempts at colonisation, the scale of Theocracy enables this and less pressing tasks to be completed in a more or less open-ended manner

With its historically specific setting, Philos has been focused in their approach, managing to take the best elements of the games that they admire and remould and enhance them, thus creating the next link in the chain. The level of detail and relatively slow pacing may put some off, but those that persevere will be rewarded.

A huge empire building game that will appeal to those expecting something different from a genre in need of innovation

PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	9	COMPLEXITY	8
SOUND FX	7	INTERFACE	8
MUSIC	5	MULTIPLAY	7
CHALLENGE	8	AI	6
REALISM	9	GAMEPLAY	8

Conclusion What AoEII should have been, with a much better combat system and challenging problems. Can be repetitive and the lack of a save facility in battles is annoying

9/10

ENEMY YOU

TERROR FROM ABOVE, BELOW AND ALL SIDES.
IS THERE ANY WAY OUT FOR THE MAVERICK 45TH SQUADRON?

www.starlancer.co.uk

The Sims

DEVELOPER: MICROPROSE PUBLISHER: HASBRO INTERACTIVE
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
• Pentium 166MHz • Win 95/98 • 8X CD-ROM • 32Mb RAM • 70Mb Hard Drive • 2Mb video RAM minimum • Win 95/98 compatible soundcard • Direct X version 7

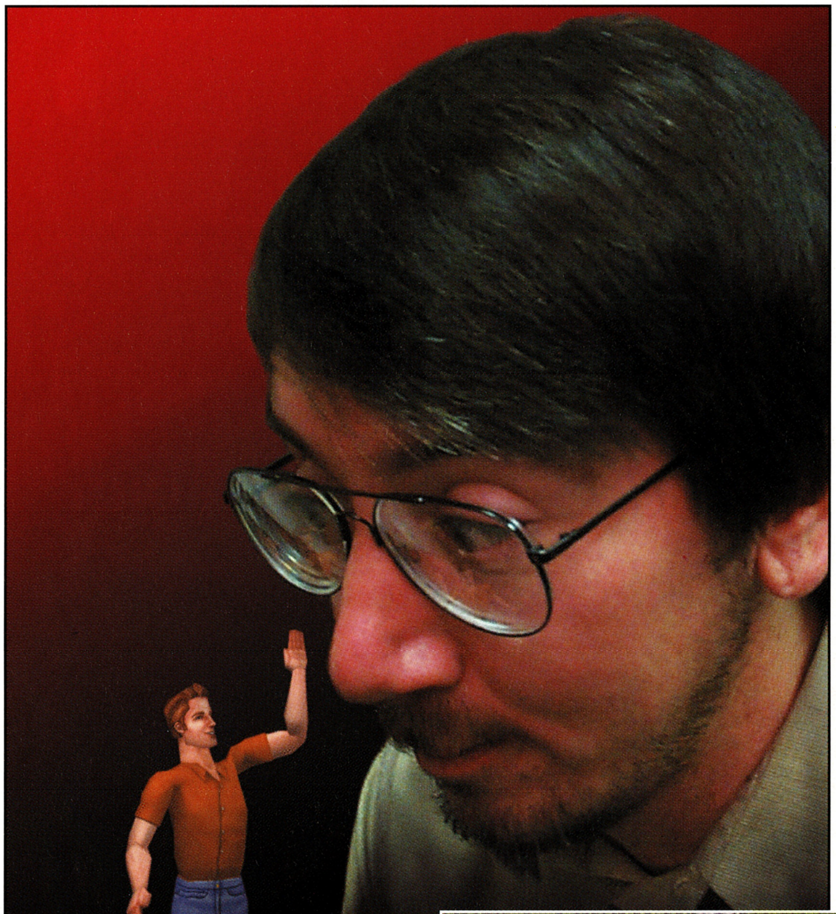
This simulation of life set in the 'burbs gives you seemingly god-like powers, until your Sim creations rebel and act weird, as ***Damon Wilson*** *discovers*

Everyone played with dollies at some point in their childhood. For women this statement is unlikely to hold any horror, but men – otherwise completely at home with their sexual identities – will choke and bluster at the suggestion. A chap who openly wears floral ballgowns at weekends is now perfectly acceptable in even conservative social circles, but reveal that he played with dolls as a kid and he will be laughed or shamed from the room.

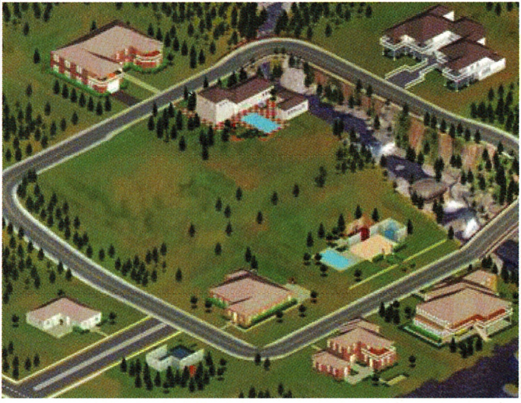
If you too are frothing at the mouth at this moment, or hautily dismissing the very idea that you indulged in such effeminate activities, pause and think a moment: Action Man, GI Joe, Star Wars action figures, even toy soldiers – they are all a type of dolly. Little human manikins that children role-play through dramas: whether tea parties or storming up the beach at Normandy.

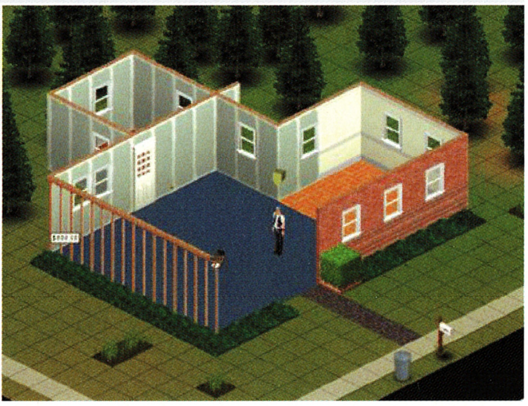
Some Jungian psychoanalysts recognise the vital part these games play in the formation and maintenance of child (and adult) personalities, and ask patients to play freeform games in sandboxes with a selection of dolls and figurines. Laugh if you will, but this technique has proved very effective, especially in psychological shock cases like post-traumatic stress syndrome. For example, Vietnam veterans have ceased to have regular nightmares after 'playing' the homecoming parade they never got or saying goodbye to dead comrades.

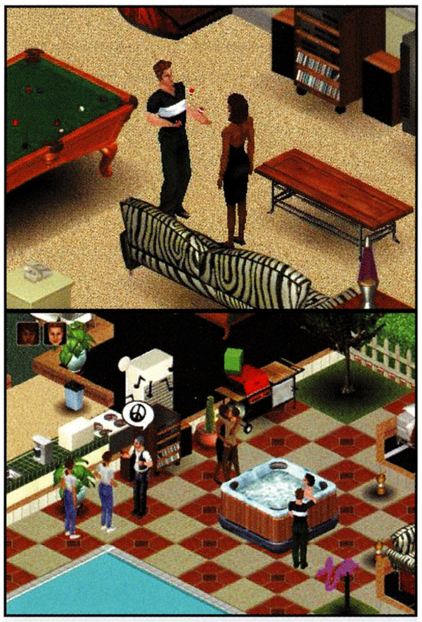
So we come to **The Sims**. A freeform computer game in which you



Below: Designer Will Wright contemplates his creation
Below left: The Sim neighbourhood – room for more
Below right: Bloody Sim builders never finish on time







Above: Those Sim houseparties can get pretty wild – especially if you decide to drop a conversational jacuzzi in the middle of the guests

create a household of little people and can control their every action, from romancing a neighbour to flushing the toilet.

The player is allowed to design every aspect of these creatures' lives. You can build them a house, then choose the decor and appliances depending on your budget. You can design them and their family (if any), including facial features, clothes and personality. Once you have moved them in, you can make them get jobs and interact with the neighbours. No guns, no aliens, no mission objectives – just playing at real life with little human manikins. In short, The Sims is a computer dolls' house.

If you have ever played any of Maxis' previous SimCity games, you will recognise the basic game format. A living, developing community which will try to get by on its rather meagre AI, but needs a god-like player to intervene and help things along if it is to avoid disaster. The game cannot be 'won,' because it has no end point and no specific goals beyond letting the player do as they wish.

In SimCity, this meant that you could try to create a sprawling metropolis, full of gorgeous buildings and happy taxpayers or, on the other hand, you could create a semi-civilised hicksville, beset by public service strikes, natural disasters and giant, fire-breathing lizards.

In The Sims, the focus is closer to ground level and everything is more personal, but the freedom of action is the same. Create happy, fulfilled households or savage, dysfunctional slums. It's your choice.

The first thing to do, obviously, is create a set of Sims to play with. You can have up to eight in a single household, but more than two or three will be as much as the average beginner can handle. For each, you choose whether they are to be male or female, children or adults (children appear to be about eight-years-old and, like Peter Pan, never grow-up). Like a deluxe Barbie doll set, there are dozens of heads and clothing styles to choose for your Sims, but these are purely cosmetic – a Sim that looks like Quasimodo's uglier brother can still be a big hit with the ladies (or lads, as we will see later).

NAUGHTY OR NICE

As in Heaven, all that matters in the Sim neighbourhood is personality. This is defined into five sections: Neat, Outgoing, Active, Playful and Nice. These are mostly self-explanatory – a predominately neat Sim tidies-up a lot, a playful Sim throws wild parties and a nice Sim gets lots of compliments. The player divides a set number of points between these personality sections, but can leave some or all blank if they want to create a social misfit with the personality of a games reviewer.

Once your Sims are dropped into the game world, you will see that each has eight sliding scales indicating their basic

▶▶

A short history of Sim

In 1987, computer programmer Will Wright was introduced to a chap called Jeff Braun at a California pizza party. Will happened to mention to Jeff that he was working on a 'toy' for personal computers: a program that would allow the player to design, build, rule and (if the mood took them) destroy a modern American town. There would be no final aim or way to 'win' - just play until your town goes broke or you get bored.... Jeff loved the idea and offered to fund its development. The result, two years later, was SimCity. The program confounded predictions that an open-ended, 'unwinnable' game would flop; in fact, it was one of the first genuinely best-selling computer games. People especially enjoyed the 'real-life' feel of the game: jaded by endless sci-fi, fantasy and military settings, it was strangely pleasant to spend a few hours re-arranging your town's sewage system. Now, ten years later, Maxis (Jeff and Will's software development company) has produced half-a-dozen Sim games, covering areas as varied as wild ant colonies (SimAnt), major construction programs (SimTower) and planetary ecology (SimEarth). Yet the main focus in each Sim game has always been reality. You have the option to allow giant, fire-breathing lizards to attack your SimCity, for example, but this only serves to underline the necessity of maintaining good industrial relations with your Sim fire brigade.

PCSG recently had the opportunity to chat with Will Wright about the development of The Sims. The game has been in development, off and on, for the past seven years. The major problem they faced all along was getting the Sims' AI right.Will admits there is a limit to the reality of the artificial intelligence, given the present state-of-the-art: "Modelling human behaviour has always been the Holy Grail for a lot of computer scientists. We're still a long ways from doing that. I think that the behavioural side [of AI] is what is we're going to be going after for the next ten years." Still, the team found a clever way of getting the behaviour of Sims to look realistic. In fact, the AI is not lodged in the Sims themselves, but in the objects around them. For example, interaction with a sink will tell a Sim how to wash themselves or dishes, depending on the situation. This 'knowledge' is not stored in the Sim, but in the sink. Remove the sink and the Sim will never be tempted to wash. In effect, a Sim is mentally an empty stage, waiting for the world to act upon it. I'm sure we've all met real people like that...

DOGFIGHT

DOGMEAT

YOUR EQUIPMENT IS OBSOLETE AND THE BLACK GUARD ARE ON YOUR TAIL.
SO WHAT YOU GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

COMING SOON

www.starlancer.co.uk

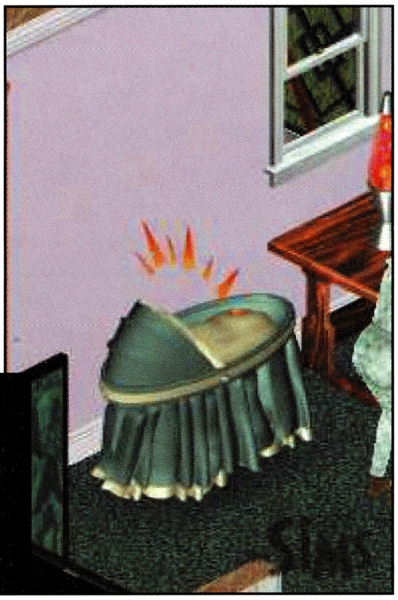
Barry Ryan says... 9/10

The Sims is all about cultivating the art of living vicariously and as such it perfectly captures the post-millennial Zeitgeist. You see, we're all retreating into ourselves, forming introverted gated communities with minimal contact with the outside world. At least, that's what the social commentators are telling us. Our sense of community is rapidly fading, and a gossip down the local pub or laundromat has been supplanted by a night in with the Eastenders or the denizens of Coronation Street. The Sims is an extension of this phenomenon – it's a soap opera for your PC. It's certainly not a game, not in the traditional sense; its more of a hobby or a project. It's like having a goldfish or a cat. You'll feed it occasionally, pet it every now and then and maybe take it out for a walk. Playing The Sims is a compulsive, utterly addictive experience in the same way that Sim City was. You can't win, you can't loose, and if you try to rationalise your utterly obsessive non-stop playing of the thing you'll more than likely come up blank. My top ten gaming wish list certainly doesn't include pondering the vagaries of interior design, dealing with the exigencies of the sphincter muscle or wondering where my little Sim people are going to get their next meal from. Yet this is the only game in town at the moment. It's become a cause celebre in the media, with august publications such as The Observer devoting two, yes two, whole pages of their Sunday supplement magazine to its dissection and analysis. It should appeal to a whole cross-section of the gaming community and many industry insiders are hoping that this is the game which will tap into the vast unexploited market of potential female gamers. When all the hype subsides and The Sims becomes yesterday's news, you'll still find yourself deeply immersed in the microcosmic world contained inside your PC.

Brilliant concept, excellent design. It's not a game, but it'll still eat your life. This one will run...

needs. These are Hunger (the poor little thing can starve to death if you are negligent), Comfort (bring out the comfy chair!), Hygiene (I'm a bit hazy on this one myself), Bladder (how nitty-gritty did they need to get?), Energy (boosted by sleep and/or coffee), Fun (read a book, watch the box or snog your best friend's wife), Social (even loners need to chat now and again) and finally Room (aesthetic enjoyment of their Sim surroundings – buy them a nice painting or install bigger windows and this goes up). As time passes these needs fluctuate depending on the Sim in question's activities and the player quickly becomes a willing slave to the little dials, fussing over them like an over-anxious mother. The Sims do actually look after their own needs if left alone, but are prone to wetting themselves in public or leaving rotting piles of rubbish on the kitchen floor because they aren't too bright.

So, once you've finished creating a Sim family, you can drop them into a pre-built house or can build them one yourself on an empty lot. The Sim neighbourhood is viewed from above with an isometric view. When choosing a house or lot, you can see the



Right: Bringing-up a Sim youngster is pretty difficult. If you neglect them, social services will take the little howler away

In a Sim world of your own...

Maxis are making full use of the open-ended aspect to the game. The Sims website (www.TheSims.com) carries weekly downloads. When we checked today, for example, there was an annoying Sim cuckoo clock to stick on a Sim wall. There were also the objects added in previous weeks – a pinball machine and several different wall lights – and rumours abound of a Sim wall-mounted moose head next week. This might not sound like much just now, but the site has only been up a couple of weeks. Play the game for six months and there should be enough new fixtures to completely make-over your Sims' drab little home. (It is a possibly disturbing fact that The Sims brings out the interior designer in even the most lumpen of us.)

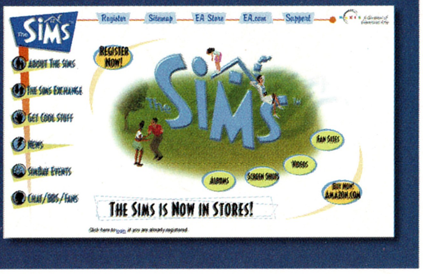
As well as new objects, the site promises new and bizarre skins (dress your Sims as Antony and Cleopatra or Robin and Marion next week! Be still my throbbing heart). Players are also encouraged to chat with each other and exchange their Sims – the cyberspace version of the slave trade, in my opinion, but maybe I'm a bit precious about my little Sim dears.

The idea of all this is to maintain the player's interest in the game. Will Wright admitted to PCSG that his design team aimed The Sims to be an all-round hobby, rather than just another game. If they get their wish, The Sims will develop a worldwide network of fans, all beavering away building up interesting Sim communities and swapping skins and objects. At present it is hard to see how this could be sustained, even with the weekly injection of ephemera from the Sims website. Could even the most anal-retentive player sustain interest in rearranging Sim furniture for more than a few months?

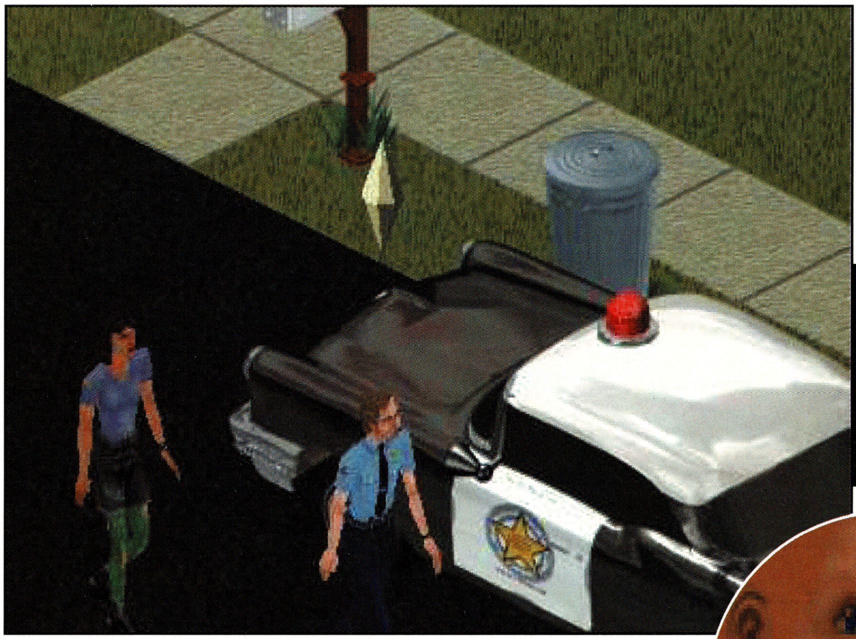
Will Wright reveals that there are plans to counter growing apathy in Sims gamers by letting the players get involved in designing the game themselves. Maxis have already released Sim face and skin designer programs and, in the future, aim to offer object and career designers. The career program will be a simple matter of rearranging goals and renaming career paths for your Sims, but the object designer should prove something of a challenge for both Maxis and the players.

As you will know if you have read the Short Sim History box, Sim actions are governed by the objects around them: a sofa tells them how to sit or lie down on it, a cooker lets them how to cook a meal or set the house on fire, and so forth. Now imagine being able to design a sprite for, say, a space-hopper; you would have to define a complete bouncing-about routine that would kick-in when a Sim interacted with the object. How high and how long would they bounce? Will they be able to knock over and annoy other Sims while doing so? Will their fitness rate increase while they make an all-round twit of themselves? The possibilities are mind-boggling.

Maxis are keen to publish an object designer, but making such a program usable by everyday game players (without a degree in advanced programming) is rather a huge challenge. If they succeed, we will not only see new and fun objects (the Sims design team were, at one point, working on a Sim football that contained the full rules for one-on-one Sim soccer) but combined with the proposed decor design program and the already available skin designer, you could create you own little world... the Sims in Space, Sim Flintstones, Sim horror movies – possibilities are endless.



THE SIMS IS NOW IN STORES!

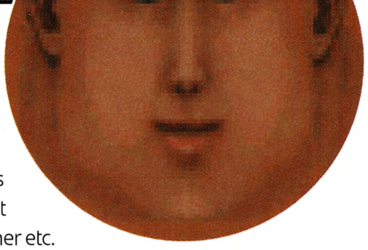


Quote

The building/furnishing interface may at first seem daunting, but it has been well designed and quickly becomes second nature

Unquote

Left: A mixed Sim couple: he's a cop, she's a sneak-thief. But it doesn't get in the way of their relationship



whole area, but when actually playing, you will only be able to see the chosen Sim house. The building/furnishing interface may at first seem daunting but it has been well designed and quickly becomes second nature. Of course, building or buying costs money, of which you have only a small amount to begin with, so a three-room shack is the best you will be able to manage until your Sims get jobs.

As the family's bank balance builds up, you can either add more rooms or simply move them to a bigger house. Once you've got a roof over their little heads, you need to buy your family some furniture and fittings. The uses of some of these are obvious - toilets to relieve bladders, beds to increase energy and comfort levels, cookers for making dinner etc. Others are less obvious: the fridge, for example is the equivalent of a grocer's shop - infinite amounts of food can be taken out, but everything costs money. A lot of the household objects also have dual roles, like the television. This will increase a Sim's Fun level if viewed alone, but will also increase their Social and Relationship levels if watched with a friend.

Now I've purposely left out Relationship levels until now, because this is really the heart of the game. Every Sim met by one of your Sims is given a Relationship rating. This runs from minus 100 to plus 100, and starts at zero on a first meeting. Minus numbers are earned if the Sims naturally don't like each other (due to badly mismatched personality types), but as often as not they will give each other the benefit of the doubt and earn a few plus points each time they bump into each other. You, the player, come in either as Cupid or Satan, depending, I suppose, on your personality type...

MEET AND GREET

As with the non-animate objects in the game, if you click on a non-controlled Sim a circular menu of interactive possibilities pops-up. On first acquaintance this will consist of one option: 'Greet.' With introductions out of the way your Sim can try 'Talk,' 'Joke' or 'Insult.' As the relationship develops more option's, like 'Tease' and 'Give Back-Rub,' become available. Each earns or loses a number of Relationship points (teasing a friend can be accepted as just a bit of fun, while back-rubbing a comparative stranger can

▸▸

Damon Wilson says... 9/10

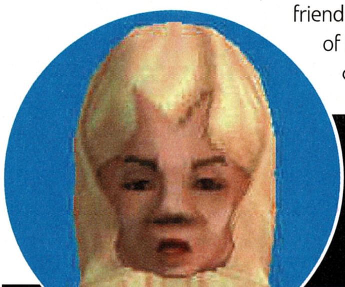
I approached this game with some trepidation. I knew from an industry preview that the game involved micro-managing the lives of the little Sim people, and this made me groan. What could be more pointlessly dull than telling dim-witted little sprites to flush the loo, go to bed early and eat regular meals? If I wanted to be a ripe candidate for parenthood, I would never have become a full-time computer gamer... and now Maxis has found a fiendish way to combine the two.

Now I see the error of my ways. Although the player does have to chase the little dears about quite a bit, his Sims do try to look after themselves as much as possible. In fact, I suspect that the few embarrassing 'wetting' incidents my Sims suffered have been due to me giving them too many orders and not remembering to check their bladder levels. Similarly, the house-burning-down incident was apparently due to the fact that I hadn't put in a smoke detector (even though the Sims themselves were on fire).

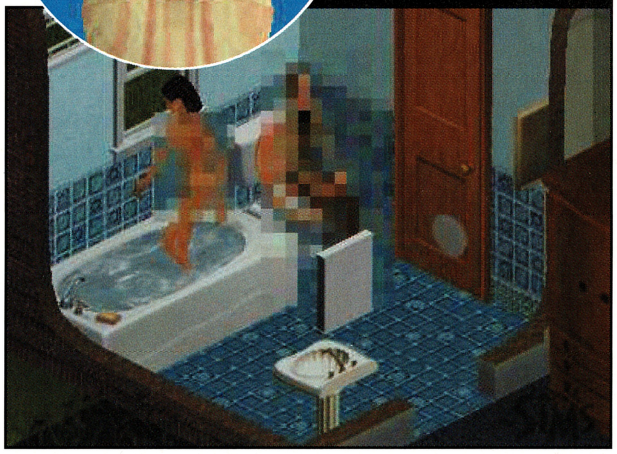
In fact, the apparent intelligence of the Sims is what won me over to this game. Left to their own devices, and provided the player has put in the basic living equipment, they will adequately maintain themselves. If you wish, you can leave the game ticking-over and watch it like a cross between a soap opera and a goldfish tank. On their own, Sims live dull, unambitious, but reasonable lives.

So, when the player intervenes they are acting more as a Sim muse than a Sim god. By influencing Sims to chat-up that fanciable person next door, get well-paid jobs and live healthy lives, you become the sort of guardian angel we all need. Then you can create havoc by making them fall in love with their partner's worst enemy and can sit back and watch the sparks fly...

More than just a Sim doll's house, but less than a Sim soap opera. My only reservation is how long such a freeform game can hold the player's interest

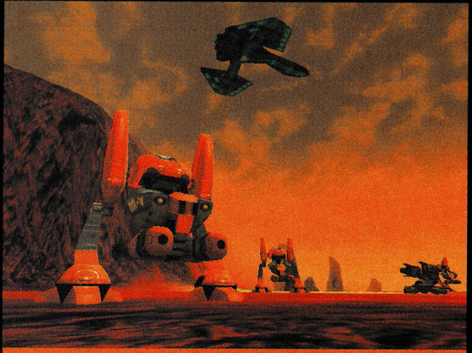


Below: There is no Sim smut: bathroom activities are blurred out. Tough luck, all you Sim voyeurs

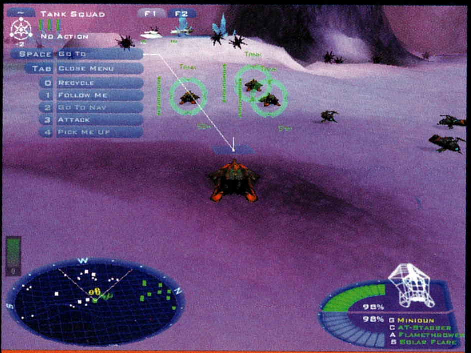


Who better to make life and death decis

Control a Battalion
Face the front lines in first-person, calling in airstrikes and commanding futuristic customisable vehicles, including tanks, walkers and hoverbikes, via a powerful interface.



Destroy Alien Scum
Take on morphing enemies with advanced unit tactics like choosing the best weapon and mine-laying. Instant action and strategy missions get you into the solo or online warfare.


Tank Squad
F1
F2
No Action
Space Go To
Tab Close Menu
0 Recycle
1 Follow Me
2 Go To Nav
3 Attack
4 Pick Me Up
Tank
98%
98% G Minigun
C AT-Stabber
A Flamethrower
S Solar Flare

Battle and Build
Use the terrain to your advantage on five completely 3-D planets. Form massive armies, construct bases and deploy your defenses across an alien solar system.

Battlezone™ Critical Acclaim:

"an essential purchase for any PC gamer"
PC format 91%

PC Format Gold Award

"a modern classic."
Edge 9/10

EDGE

"PC Gamer weeps tears of joy at the birth of a genre"
PC Gamer 93%

PC GAMER

PANDEMIC

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ions in battle than a man in harm's way?
LEAD FROM THE FRONT
BATTLEZONE II
COMBAT COMMANDER

earn an indignant slap). Left without any contact, these points will gravitate back to zero, so neglect will surely lose friendships, but keeping out of the firing line can also heal rifts.

At plus 50 Relationship points a Sim will get a smiley face icon, indicating that they have become a close friend to your Sim. At plus 100 they get a little heart icon and fall in love – but note, the other Sim will not share their feelings if they have not got the requisite Relationship points. To the game's credit, it draws no distinction between same and different sex relationships and also allows polygamy (religion is not a game element, but presumably Sims are all Mormons, Muslims or swingers). It can all become a tangled emotional web...

BIRDS AND BEES

The result of lots of negative interaction choices can lead to fistfights but nothing worse. Your Sims won't actually consider murdering each other, for example. In fact, all the interesting possibilities lie in the positive direction. Talk leads to flirting and flirting to dancing and kissing; but before you get too interested, that is as far as physical interaction goes in the game. Sims sleep together – if they like each other enough – but do so side-by-side, like innocent maiden aunts.

The way to make babies in the game is by doing lots of kissing. Sooner or later, a lip-wrestling couple will wonder if it is time to have a baby (same-sex couples wonder if they should adopt). If you, as their pseudo-higher consciousness, give the go-ahead, a baby arrives in a cot and a shower of flowers. Three game days later, if you and your Sims tend it enough (to avoid removal by Social Services) the baby will turn into a Sim child and proceed to give you as many headaches as its parents.

As if all these social shenanigans aren't enough, you need to worry about your Sims' careers. There are ten career tracks, including everyday jobs like business and medicine to the more peculiar crime, politics and stunt-person possibilities.

To achieve promotions, and better wages, they need to increase skills like fitness, mechanical aptitude, creativity and logistics. This is achieved by getting them to exercise, read suitable books, paint pictures, play chess and so on.

The actual Sim work all takes place off

Martin Croft says... 8/10

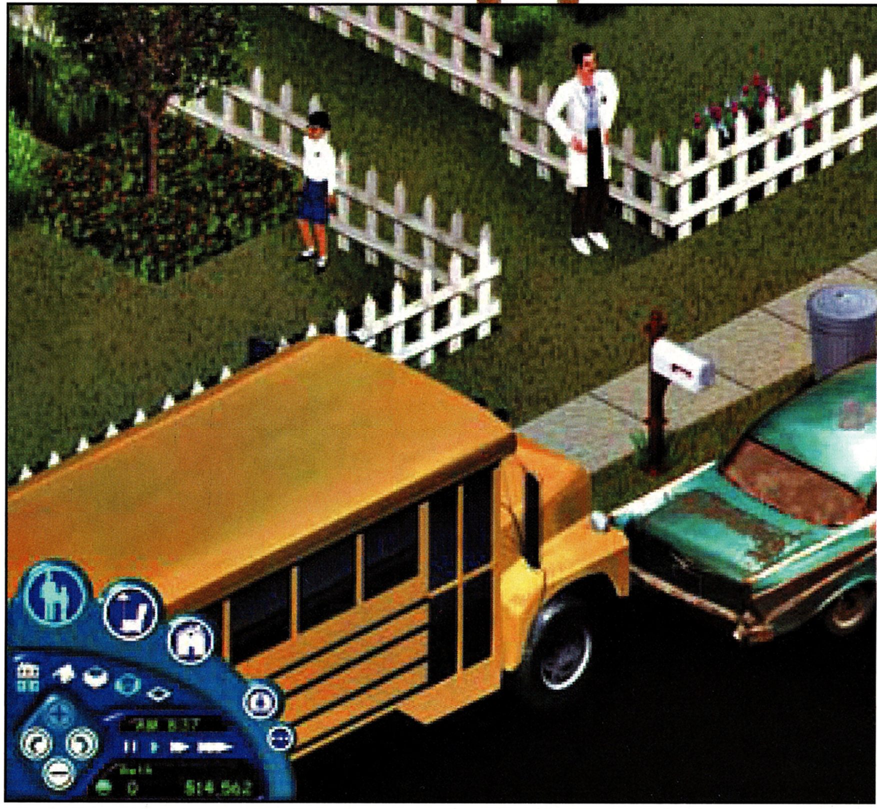
There's something horribly compulsive about The Sims. Despite a childhood in which I managed to avoid playing with ant farms, Sea Monkeys or similar control-freak pastimes, I have been well and truly caught by Will Wright's latest. I didn't want to like it – and, in fact, I'm not sure I do like it. It's frustrating, it's stupid (well, the Sims themselves are, anyway) and it's a huge waste of time – but waste time on it is just what I'm going to find myself doing, unless I'm incredibly self-disciplined.

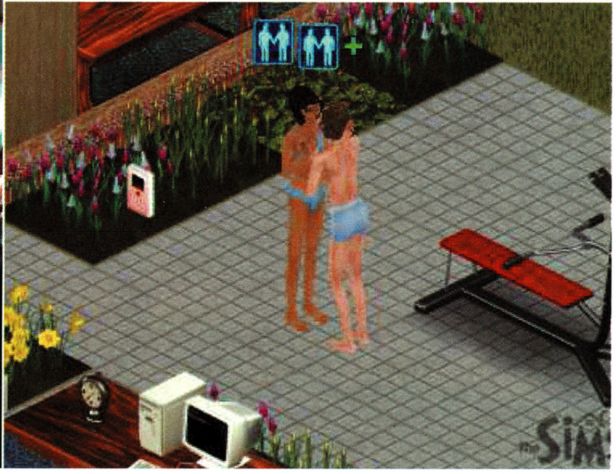
I can't explain what it is, but there is something about this game that just keeps you at it. Never mind that you are dealing with a group of incompetent morons who can't manage the simplest of tasks for themselves (like wiping their own... mess up), you just can't desert them. You'll hate them, you'll scream invective at them, you'll watch in bafflement as they set themselves on fire while trying to fry an egg, and stand there burning merrily like a guy (that's a stuffed effigy, for our American readers, not a human male) on Bonfire Night without making the simplest of attempts to save themselves. But whatever they do, and however badly they do it, you'll keep on watching.

There is only one thing in this world which compares to playing The Sims – and that's watching the soaps. I don't do it any more, but there was a time when I used to watch East Enders, Dynasty, Dallas – and General Hospital and As the World Turns and All my Children (I used to live in America); and the sensation of playing The Sims is exactly the same. You can't believe you're doing it, you know that the activities of these little people on the screen is irrelevant to your real life, and you can't look away.

But is it actually a game? God only knows. And let's face it, he's probably watching our antics on a screen right now and wondering exactly the same...

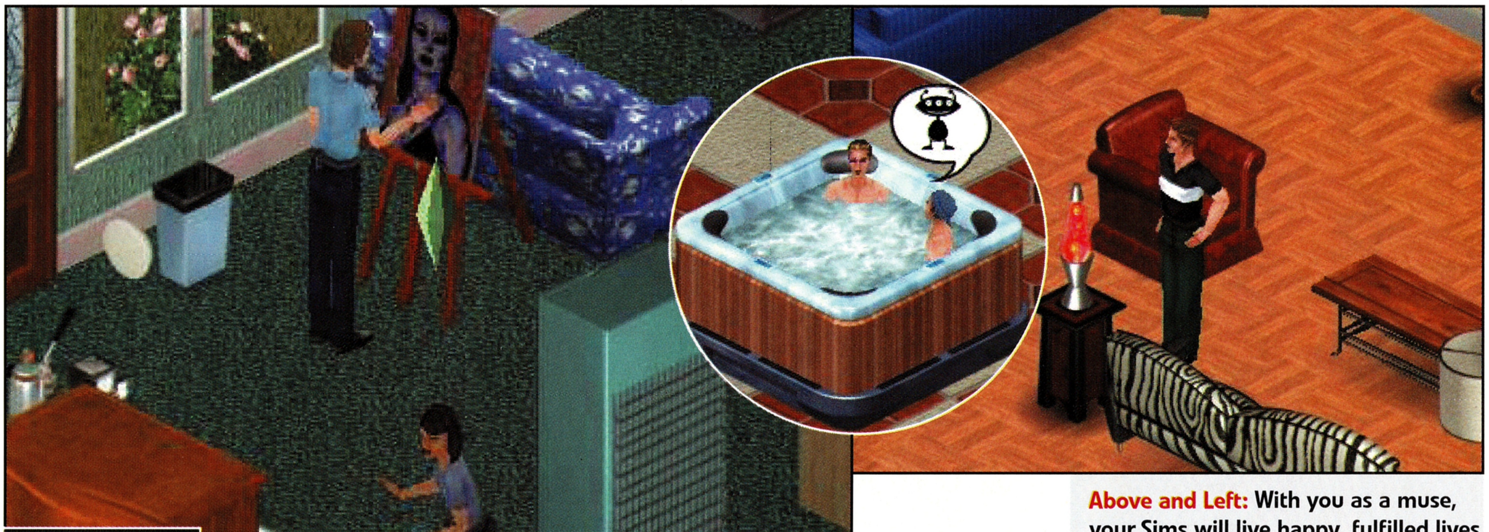
Brilliantly, obsessively compulsive program which will absorb your every waking hour if you let it. But will you enjoy it?





Left: It's time to leave for for Sim work and Sim school

Below: Kissing in swimwear is as about as raunchy as it gets



Above and Left: With you as a muse, your Sims will live happy, fulfilled lives – unless and until you start to feel malicious, that is...

Left: A non-player burglar is nabbed because you fitted a burglar alarm – your lucky Sims get $1000 reward

screen (Sims get driven to and from work each day by a car-pool) and is not part of the gameplay. Presumably Maxis are thinking about expanding the work aspect into The Sims 2...

It is the same for any Sim children you may have about the place. These, like their parents/guardians, get picked up every morning (but by school bus) and have to swat away at home to improve their grades. Every day has the same routine because, in Sim Land, there are no weekends or holidays. (your Sims obviously work flexitime in an employers' market).

R&R remains vital for Sims, however. Work them every day and their need scores will go critical in no time. Every few days it is necessary to tell them to ignore the tooting of the pick-up vehicle and enjoy some quality time at home to recharge their batteries and catch up with friends. Of course, if they take three or four days off in a row, the swine Sim boss will sack them – and there are no industrial tribunals in the Sim world of work.

So, if at all possible, the other Sims in the household should take the same precious days off to allow a bit of home socialising. Otherwise, once happy families soon start acting like strangers and, more to the point, refuse to sleep in the same bed, necessitating the purchase of two singles per couple.

Now, all this might sound a little too much like real-life: certainly, The Sims is not just your average strategy, god-sim. Why on earth, you may be wondering, would anyone want to deal with real-life problems in a game – can't you do that in the comfort of your own home, without even needing to turn on your computer?

When PCSG recently interviewed Will Wright – head of the design team responsible for The Sims – he admitted that they had partially aimed the game at improving the lives of the players.

TAPPING INTO THE SUBCONSCIOUS

"We're trying to expose certain strategies that people are actually thinking about all the time subconsciously, but when you put them into a game format they merge into the conscious level... We try to make it very obvious – the trade-off between work and family and friends and money and social lives: all these things people are always juggling. When you've been playing with little toy people you may go back and look at your own life in different ways," explained Wright. So, were they successful? All in all, the Sims plays exactly like a doll's house. Create social situations, have parties, act-out rather childish romances: all that stuff little girls fill their time with. Yet it is as addictive as a soap opera. A Jungian psychoanalyst might say this is because the game allows the player to exercise their subconscious mind through creative role-playing.

True or not, you will find yourself playing just a little bit longer... Until you miss several meals in a row, your partner despairs of you ever coming to bed and eventually you have to rush to the toilet to prevent yourself soiling the computer chair – all as if you were a badly managed Sim yourself. PCSG.

Quote

> **It is as addictive as a soap opera. A Jungian psychoanalyst might say this is because the game allows the player to exercise their subconscious mind through creative role-playing**

Unquote

PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	7	COMPLEXITY	8
SOUND FX	6	INTERFACE	9
MUSIC	7	MULTIPLAY	n/a
CHALLENGE	3	GAMEPLAY	9
REALISM	10	AI	8

Conclusion

Ground-breaking, compulsive, amusing simulation of life in the California burbs – but unless you're into doll's houses, possibly only of short-term interest

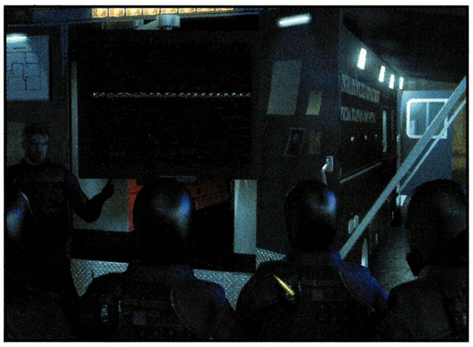
9/10

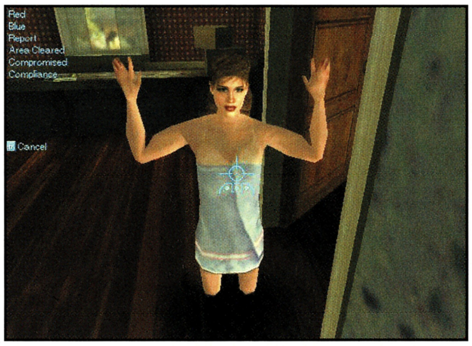
DEVELOPER: SIERRA STUDIOS **PUBLISHER:** SIERRA ONLINE
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
• Pentium 233MHz • Win 95/98 • 4X CD-ROM • 32Mb RAM • 400Mb Hard Drive space • 800x600 SVGA Video card • Direct X version 6.1

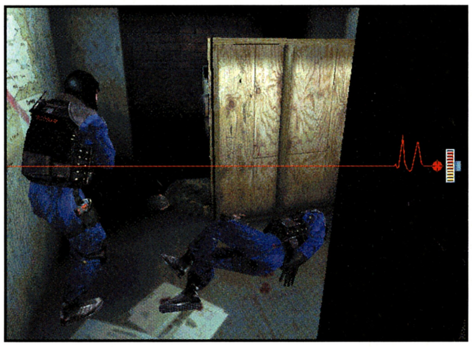
SWAT 3: Close

SERGEANT
LOS ANGELES POLICE
714

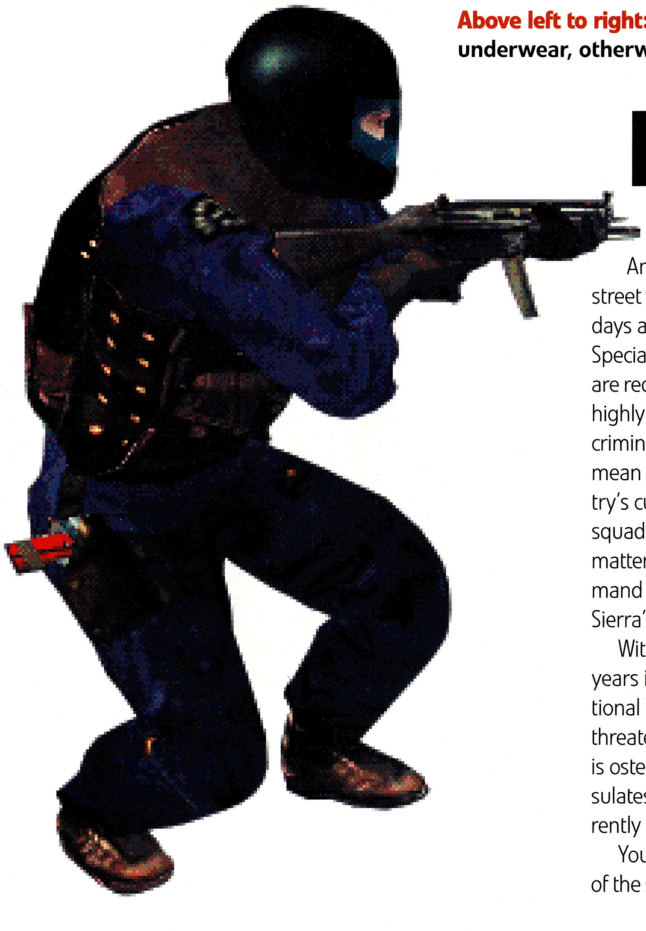
***Barry Ryan** takes us on a ride through the seamier streets of Los Angeles in his SWAT battlewagon*







Above left to right: **Planning makes perfect; and don't get distracted by hostages in their underwear, otherwise you'll end up like this poor lad, dead in a toilet**



Let me take you back to a kinder, gentler era when TJ Hooker (aka William Shatner in an industrial strength corset), and his trusty sidekick Romano were all that Los Angeles needed to keep the rising tide of street violence in check. Alas, these halcyon days are no more. Today, the services of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams are required to deal with the threat posed by highly aggressive, well armed and ruthless criminals who vie for supremacy on the mean streets of LA. Given the games industry's current penchant for ultra realistic squad level tactical games, it was only a matter of time before we were given command of our very own SWAT team – cue Sierra's long-running SWAT series.

With **SWAT3,** Sierra has taken us five years into the future. Domestic and international terrorism is rife and the US is being threatened on all sides. But, while the game is ostensibly set in the future, it neatly encapsulates a lot of the post-millennial fears currently assailing contemporary America.

You'll find yourself going up against lots of the skeletons, real or imagined, which reside in modern America's closet. There'll be dubious looking Middle Eastern types while the current bete noir, the militias, are well represented. In many respects, it's a real stroll through America's extensive pop culture of violence.

There's a distinctly Sharon Tate-esque hostage crisis to be dealt with; we've also got terrorists threatening to blow up LA with stolen nuclear weapons and in another episode we get to go head to head with terrorists threatening to take out passenger jets using surface to air missiles. Standard Hollywood, sub X-Files fare, but the game is all the better for it. The mise-en-scene is second to none and there is a distinctly cinematic feel to the gameplay.

The campaign game takes place over a week. But his isn't any ordinary week – The UN is signing the Nuclear Abolishment Treaty (sic) and you and your SWAT team are all that stand between LA and the evil forces of global and domestic terrorism intent on spoiling the party. If you thought Red Storm's Rogue Spear was the last word in realism, SWAT3 may force a re-evaluation. This isn't so much a game as a simulation.

Quarters Battle

The History of SWAT

The SWAT, or Special Weapons and Tactics, teams were a product of the great and unprecedented social upheaval which swept across America in the late '60s. The need for a unit with specific and specialised weapons and tactics training was made clear in Los Angeles in the wake of the infamous Watts Riots. The Watts Riots also coincided with a spate of sniper attacks against both civilians and police officers in Los Angeles County. A young police officer, John Nelson, crystalised the SWAT concept and presented it to the powers that be. The first SWAT teams were composed of 15 four man teams who had volunteered from the ranks of the police force. They were generally chosen for their prior military experience and/or specialised skills and experience. Each unit was activated on a monthly basis for specialised training and they were originally referred to as 'Station Defence Teams', and were used to provide security for police stations during times of civil unrest.

In 1971, they were formally constituted as a full time unit within the Los Angeles metropolitan division. This was largely in response to the ongoing activities of subversive groups and the increased frequency of organised criminal activity. There was also increasing unease concerning the rising tide of crime and it was decided that a full time, fully professional paramilitary unit was required to form an adequate and effective response. The constitution of the SWAT teams also solved one of the biggest problems faced by the Los Angeles police – mustering an effective team response to an incident quickly and efficiently.

The success of the LA SWAT teams didn't go unnoticed by other police forces in the US and it wasn't long before most divisions boasted a squad of highly trained specialists constituted along the model pioneered by the LAPD.

SWAT teams are beloved of the Hollywood mythmakers and tend to be portrayed in one of two guises. They are either a bumbling band of gung-ho, testosterone fuelled morons who bungle every action (the Die Hard movies) or a group of psychotic supermen with little or no concept of the finer points of life such as ethics or personal morality (The Negotiator, Speed).

The reality is, of course, substantially different and these guys are at the cutting edge of counter-terrorism operations. They've trained with the German GSG9, French GIGN and the British SAS. If you're a criminal, and they get on your case, it's probably best to lay down your weapons and come out with your hands up. In Los Angeles the SWAT teams deal with about 80 barricaded suspects and serve over 50 high risk warrants a year. The vast majority of these incidents are resolved quickly and professionally without a single shot being fired.

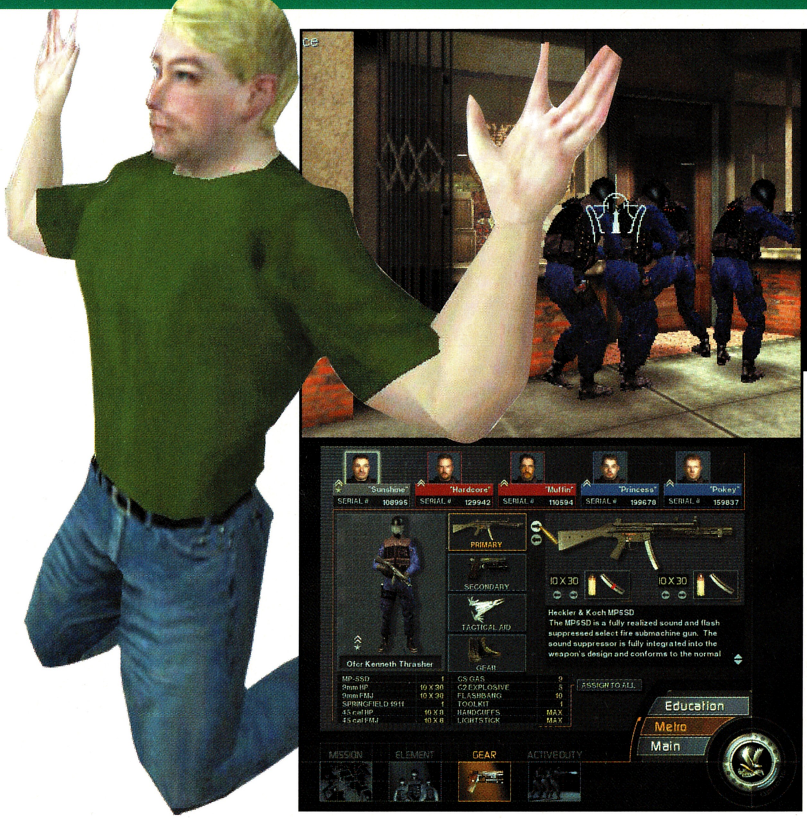
Sierra Studios has sought to faithfully re-create the real-life conditions which prevail in SWAT operations and as a result has created a gaming experience which emphasises the cerebral over the visceral.

THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT

In essence, SWAT3 is a squad level tactical shooter which operates from a first person perspective. As such, it's going to invite comparisons with Red Storm's Rainbow Six series or Illusion Soft's Hidden & Dangerous. Let me tell you now that any similarities are almost entirely superficial. This game's got about as much in common with Rogue Spear as Rogue Spear has with Quake. In other words, a casual observer could be easily gulled into thinking they represent similar gaming experiences, but any time spent playing SWAT3 will quickly disabuse you of such a notion.

The biggest difference is that SWAT3 does not have any pre-mission, strategic-level planning phase. While there's all sorts of information available to you prior to undertaking any mission, such as reports from the officers who first arrived on the scene, suspect descriptions, rap sheets, even mug

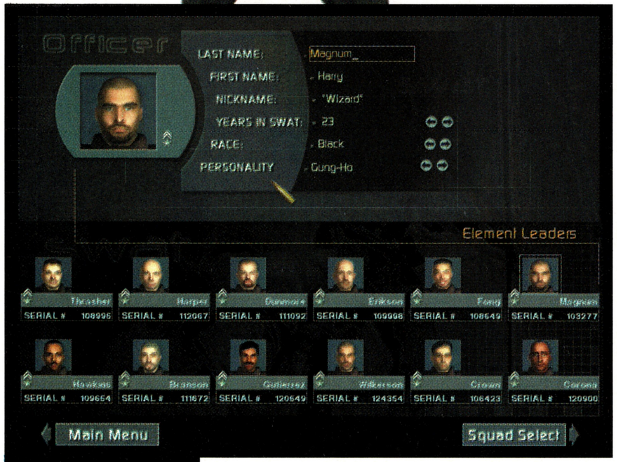
▶▶



Heckler & Koch MP5SD
The MP5SD is a fully realized sound and flash suppressed select fire submachine gun. The sound suppressor is fully integrated into the weapon's design and conforms to the normal

MP-5SD	1	CS GAS	9
9mm HP	10 X 30	C2 EXPLOSIVE	5
9mm FMJ	10 X 30	FLASHBANG	10
SPRINGFIELD 1911	1	TOOLKIT	1
45 cal HP	10 X 8	HANDCUFFS	MAX
45 cal FMJ	10 X 8	LIGHTSTICK	MAX

Left: A SWAT team performs a classic 'Breach, bang and clear' manoeuvre **Below:** The selection screen, where you kit your team out with everything you need



LAST NAME: Magnum_
FIRST NAME: Harry
NICKNAME: "Wizard"
YEARS IN SWAT: 23
RACE: Black
PERSONALITY: Gung-Ho

Above: The squad selection team. Here you pick the men you'll command in action

Damon Wilson says... 8/10

I hate cops. Not the police, mark you, but cops – the media vision of the law enforcement service. On television, in movies and in computer games, cops can be depicted indulging in extreme violence while the kiddies are watching, because they are killing 'bad-guys'. Oooh, it makes me mad.

Then along comes a game like Swat 3 that half knocks me off my soapbox. It is one of the few games that engages my wizened humanity gland. I find myself successfully completing a mission, then going back and replaying because: "I didn't have to kill that suspect – I'm sure given the right persuasion (and another tear gas grenade) he would have given himself up, dammit!"

The game itself is graphically beautiful and very tense. The innovative command system is elegant and practical, simplifying the complex series of orders available and, best of all, the AI of the your backup men and the suspects is very good. The art of the game is not found in charging-in and doing everything yourself, but getting your team to do it while you bag the credit later (like a good leader).

My few gripes are fairly petty. Even the recent patch does not fix the need to define the keys every time you load up, but presumably the next patch will deal with this. The lack of an in-mission save option means that in a game this hard you will be re-playing missions a lot, but that adds to the longevity.

The game is still extremely violent, mark you (which is why I've still got one foot on my soap box) but it does give you an insight into why policemen suffer so much work-related emotional strain. This, for me, is Swat 3's best aspect: it is ultra-realistic. It's not a Rambo-esque shooter or a them-or-us bloodbath. It's a grotty, dangerous, accurate police simulator.

Ultra-realistic and so extremely difficult to complete. Good, but would have been even better if they'd added multiplay option

shots and social security numbers, outside of deciding which entrance your going to use, all your planning has to be done on the hoof, and as such the game adopts an exclusively tactical approach.

You will assume the role of a SWAT element leader. Prior to beginning the game, you must choose your squad. There is a bewildering array of squads and individual officers to choose from, each with different stats, abilities and levels of experience. Some will be aggressive weapons nuts; others will favour the slow and steady approach.

Once you've made your choice, you're ready to take your element into action. You can choose the squad members who will accompany you on each mission, but you'll need to carefully husband your personnel as SWAT operations can take a heavy toll on your squad in terms of injuries and, inevitably, deaths. The element will comprise five officers, subdivided into two teams, red and blue. Each team is composed of two officers, while you will act as commander, issuing move orders, instructions and choosing general tactical approaches.

IN FULL COMMAND

This is all achieved through one of the most effective and generally excellent command and control interfaces I've ever seen in a game of this type. The people at Red Storm (Rainbow Six) and Illusion Soft Works (Hidden & Dangerous) should really take a long hard look at this system and perhaps fundamentally rethink their own rather sketchy and flawed interfaces.

The top left hand corner of your screen is where your command menu lives. It takes the form of a series of numbered options. Pressing 1 will give you access to the sub-menu for the entire unit. Pressing 2 will give you the control options for red team, pressing 3 will give you all the commands for blue team and so on. It's very important that you relegate yourself to a strictly supervisory command role. Obviously, there will be times when you'll need to get your hands dirty, but it's best to leave the grunt work to... well, the grunts. Unlike in Rogue Spear or Hidden and Dangerous, if you get taken out, that's it, game over. You can't jump to the next officer and continue the action, oh no. It's mission over, life over and back to the start for

▶▶

Mark Shaw says... 9/10

With SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle, Sierra has managed to bring unprecedented levels of authenticity (thanks in part to the development team's collaboration with SWAT members past and present), complexity and sheer playability to the First Person Shooter. Replete with claustrophobic, maze-like interiors, painfully cover-free exteriors and trigger-happy felons around every dark corner, the game manages to generate incredible tension. Indeed, the level design is uniformly excellent. There's a steep learning curve between the earlier scenarios (which can often be completed without a shot being fired) and the more complex later missions which demand almost superhuman levels of concentration. Such effort is nonetheless rewarded if hostages are rescued and bombs defused without losing a single member of your team. That, of course, depends on your skill in guiding them, and it's here that SWAT 3 comes into its own. Watching your men picking locks, handcuffing suspects and flashbanging rooms on your command is a pleasure to behold, facilitated by the well-designed in-game interface – mastering this is the key to mastering the game.

There are perhaps the only two major drawbacks; first is the failure by the designers to offer a control remapping function – a baffling oversight, given the number of key presses that are needed to complete any and every mission – and, secondly, the lack of a multiplayer option (a patch to rectify this is allegedly in the pipeline) might have affected its long-term playability if the game did not offer such a challenge to even the most hardened FPS fan. The level of dynamic control, where decisions made as the game progresses have a tangible effect on the outcome of each mission, and team co-ordination – the AI is probably the genre's best yet – are more than adequate compensation.

A squad based tactical game that will genuinely appeal to those gamers who like to think before they shoot. Great fun, and challenging, too

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Quote

> **When an action does work out well, it all appears beautifully choreographed and gives you a real thrill**

Unquote

you, matey. I know you won't pay a blind bit of heed to this piece of sage advice, and will need to find out, the hard way, that you simply cannot play this game in a similar manner to Rogue Spear, and expect to prosper. When Rogue Spear was launched, I was under the impression that it was the last word in realism. Exposure to SWAT3 has completely changed my perspective. It prides itself, and rightly so, on its ultra-realism. It has certainly managed to redefine the parameters of the first person shooter, and in many respects makes Rogue Spear look like a Quake clone.

It's not going to be everyone's cup of tea. Just as some people prefer to play X-Wing vs Tie Fighter for the instant hands on action it offers, rather than Microsoft Flight Sim 2000, so SWAT3 will have its detractors. Too realistic, too demanding, not enough emphasis on fun and playability, they'll shout. Ignore them. SWAT3 is an excellent addition to the genre, and certainly seems to presage a healthy interest in the creation of games which emphasise faithful re-creation over all else. In terms of game play, it's all about co-ordination and inter team co-operation. You can direct your teams by using your gunsight to 'show' them what you want done. Say there's a room that needs to be cleared. Place your gunsight on the door, select blue team, select the 'Breach, bang and clear' option. Select red team, tell them to provide cover for their colleagues. A member of blue team will then approach the door, deploy a breaching charge and step back. The charge is detonated, the second member of blue team deploys a flash bang. Both members of Blue Team, enter the room and perform a sweep, all the while under the cover of Red Team. Beautiful. When an action does work out well, it all appears beautifully choreographed and gives you a real thrill.

Obviously, as the leader of a SWAT team you are part of a police force whose remit is 'to serve and protect'. Therefore, technically at least, are not supposed to run about like a bunch of part time Rambos taking out every threat, perceived and otherwise, with extreme prejudice. There are missions where you'll be expected to take suspects alive, while many of the game's arenas are littered with civilians who'll wander about bemused and shell shocked, running across lines of fire with gay abandon etc...

If you start gunning these poor unfortunates down, you'll start to acquire a reputation as a loose cannon. This in turn will affect the morale of your men, causing them to lose faith in your ability as a team leader and ultimately lead to a drop in their mission performance. Consequently, you can access the wonderfully titled 'compliance' option on the command and control menu.

TAKE NO PRISONERS

If you manage to track down a suspect, you can order him or her to surrender by using this option. Sometimes they'll comply, raise their hands, and submit to your less than tender ministrations (you'll need to handcuff all subdued criminals – and in fact freed hostages, too), sometimes they'll put a nine millimetre round in your head. These are the daily trials and tribulations of a Swat officer.

A game like SWAT3 stands and falls on its AI. It's absolutely essential that your officers react in a realistic and believable manner to both your commands and external stimuli. Similarly, criminals and civilians need to act in a plausible manner to maintain the feeling and atmosphere of reality so crucial to the games overall impact. In this respect, Sierra have done a pretty good job with SWAT3. Team members are 'tactically smart', reading the 3D environment as they go along. They'll lean around corners and 'slice the pie' (move across doorways to ensure they can get maximum visibility with minimum exposure – a standard SWAT tactic) when clearing and

SWAT in Action

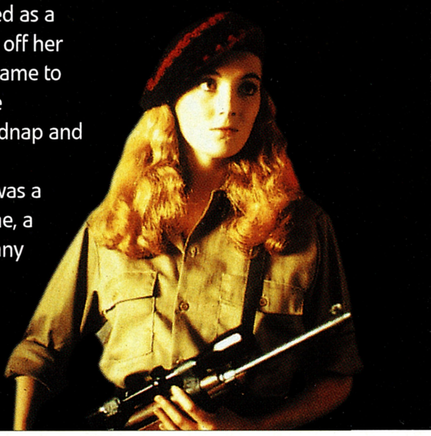
Many of the incidents in which LAPD's SWAT teams have been involved have gone down in American folklore. Considering their high profile nature, SWAT teams attract an enormous amount of media attention and none more so than the first ever. Here are two of their more (in)famous moments.

THE BLACK PANTHERS

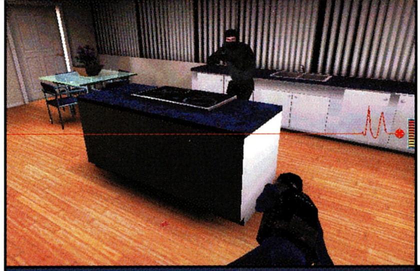
The Black Panthers, the Black political movement of the late '60s, with its radical, separatist ideology became the nemesis of white, middle America (and the subject of a Mario Van Peebles movie). The Panthers represented the antithesis of all the values espoused by the white establishment. In the atmosphere of hysteria and social upheaval so characteristic of the late sixties, it was perhaps inevitable that confrontation would ensue between the Panthers and SWAT. On December the 9th, 1969, a SWAT team was mobilised to serve a search warrant on the Black Panther Headquarters at 41st and Central Street, LA. The search was aimed at uncovering the over 70 illegally held weapons which the authorities believed were kept on the premises. The Black Panthers were, unsurprisingly, not best pleased by this development and proceeded to put up a fight. Facing them was a 40 strong SWAT team and over the course of the four hour siege, thousands of rounds of ammunition were expended by both sides. Remarkably, there were no fatalities, although three SWAT officers and three Panthers were wounded. Eventually the Panthers surrendered to police and were taken into custody.

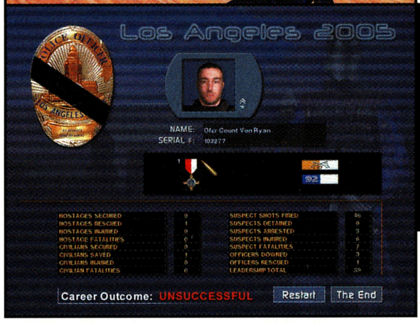
THE SYMBIONESE LIBERATION ARMY

The Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), has gone down in history as the group which kidnapped the heiress, Patty Hearst. Hearst later switched sides and resurfaced as a member of the group having cast off her past existence and changed her name to 'Tanya'. Debate still rages over the circumstances surrounding her kidnap and induction into the group. Many commentators believe that hers was a classic case of Stockholm Syndrome, a psychological condition which many hostages can go through which leads in an excessive identification with, and sympathy for, their abductors. The SLA was a classic example



Left: The Black Panthers in the film Panther, defending their rights with some heavy artillery Below: Natasha Richardson is Patty Hearst in the 1988 film of the same name





NAME: Ofcr Count Von Ryan
SERIAL #: 103277

HOSTAGES SECURED	0	SUSPECT SHOTS FIRED	46
HOSTAGES RESCUED	1	SUSPECTS DETAINED	0
HOSTAGES INJURED	0	SUSPECTS ARRESTED	3
HOSTAGE FATALITIES	0	SUSPECTS INJURED	6
CIVILIANS SECURED	0	SUSPECT FATALITIES	7
CIVILIANS SAVED	1	OFFICERS DOWNED	3
CIVILIANS INJURED	0	OFFICERS RESCUED	1
CIVILIAN FATALITIES	0	LEADERSHIP TOTAL	59

Career Outcome: UNSUCCESSFUL

Left: The flat-line means your SWAT career has just ended in a hail of bullets. It happens a lot

entering rooms. This they will do of their own volition. The bad guys come in many different AI guises. Some are common criminals who will wet their pants at the first sniff of a heavily armed SWAT officer. Others are hardened Original Gangsters who'll quite happily put you and yours in the morgue without giving it a second thought. All suspects and hostages have the ability to hide in closets and cupboards which can lead to some tense house-clearing moments. All of the game's AI creations, criminals and SWAT team members alike, will react to different stimuli such as footsteps, gunshots, discovering blood on the ground and so on.

The inhabitants of the SWAT3 gameworld will also speak to you, further enhancing the realism quotient. You'll encounter militia members accusing you of being an agent of the powers of darkness assailing American democracy and freedom. Other less ideologically motivated types will threaten you with their lawyers. Overall, SWAT3 succeeds in creating an ultra realistic gaming environment. Many of the locations, such as the LAX control tower, are faithfully recreated from real life. Graphically the game is superb, appearing as a very, very refined and air-brushed Rogue Spear.

In terms of weaponry and equipment the game is not as in depth or exhaustive as either the Rainbow Six series or Hidden & Dangerous. Lovers of Soldier of Fortune magazine and other associated forms of gun porn will perhaps find themselves a little disappointed. SWAT3 espouses the philosophy that it's not the size, or indeed velocity, of your weapon which counts but the way you use it. You'll get the standard Heckler and Koch so beloved of us all, a backup weapon, flashbangs, gas grenades, lightsticks (those plastic tubes filled with fluorescent material you see at fun fairs and carnivals) and the excellent telescopic mirror, which will allow you to scope out rooms before you enter.

This game's all about finesse, a carefully executed tactical approach and a general application of the philosophy that slow and steady wins the race. SWAT3 provides a very stiff challenge, and the initial learning curve can be steep. But get to grips with command and control you'll soon be leading LA's criminal element a merry dance. It is however a simulation in the purest sense and brooks no nonsense. Make no mistake, this is the hyper-real brought to life on your P.C. If this game were a flight sim, it'd be Microsoft's Flight Sim 2000, and just like Flight Sim 2000, after six months play I expect to receive my SWAT license in the post. PCSG.

of the many radical fringe groups spawned in the States during the sixties and seventies. Its members espoused a radical Maoist philosophy and many were disaffected middle class students. On May 17th, 1973 a heavily armed SLA group barricaded themselves into a house on East 54th St at Compton Avenue in LA. Over a prolonged siege, 26 separate appeals were made to the SLA to surrender. They refused and proceeded to discharge nearly 4,000 rounds at the SWAT teams outside. At some stage in the proceedings a fire broke out and in the ensuing conflagration all the SLA members died. Post-mortems found that all had suffered multiple gunshot wounds. The outbreak of the fire has excited controversy. The official line is that a Molotov cocktail stored in the house was shattered by a bullet, with predictable results. The unofficial belief is that the fire was either started accidentally by a tear gas round fired by the SWAT teams, or deliberately by an incendiary round. The jury is, however, still out on that one. The entire event was witnessed on TV.

Barry Ryan says... 9/10

The Sims and SWAT3 — two sides of the same gaming coin. Seriously, I know that on the face of it a people management game and a squad level, first person tactical shooter would appear to have very little in common. I would contend, however, that they are both part of the same phenomenon. Time was when the games world was replete with goblins, orcs, aliens, fantastic worlds etc; but developers have finally cottoned on to the fact that realism sells. Gritty, real world games, set in an instantly recognisable real world environment have been doing very well of late. SWAT3 takes this quest for realism to an unprecedented level. It's not a game, it's an exercise in the creation of hyper-reality on your PC. Your first impression will probably be something like this: "Oh look, it's Rogue Spear/Hidden & Dangerous, set in a contemporary urban environment with SWAT officers doubling for soldiers/members of an elite counter terrorist squad." But that would be way, way wide of the mark.

This game gives you a level of control unprecedented in the genre. The command and control system is a masterpiece and I confidently predict that variations of it will be popping up all over the place in short order. It looks wonderful – the game's many arenas are skillfully and carefully crafted, adding to the often unnervingly realistic feel. It presents a very stiff tactical challenge and in many ways provides a better bet in terms of longevity and overall difficulty than any of its competitors.

The AI, which is a crucial factor in a game of this nature, is undoubtedly the best I've encountered. All is not rosy in the garden though as, inexplicably, there is no multi-player option. Initially, Sierra had intended to include full multi-playability, but didn't. As it stands, there's talk of a multi-player patch including co-operative and team-on-team deathmatches.

Brilliant tactical simulation which reaches new heights of realism and authenticity. Excellent AI makes for challenging gameplay

PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	9	COMPLEXITY	8
SOUND FX	8	INTERFACE	10
MUSIC	5	MULTIPLAY	n/a
CHALLENGE	9	GAMEPLAY	9
REALISM	10	AI	8

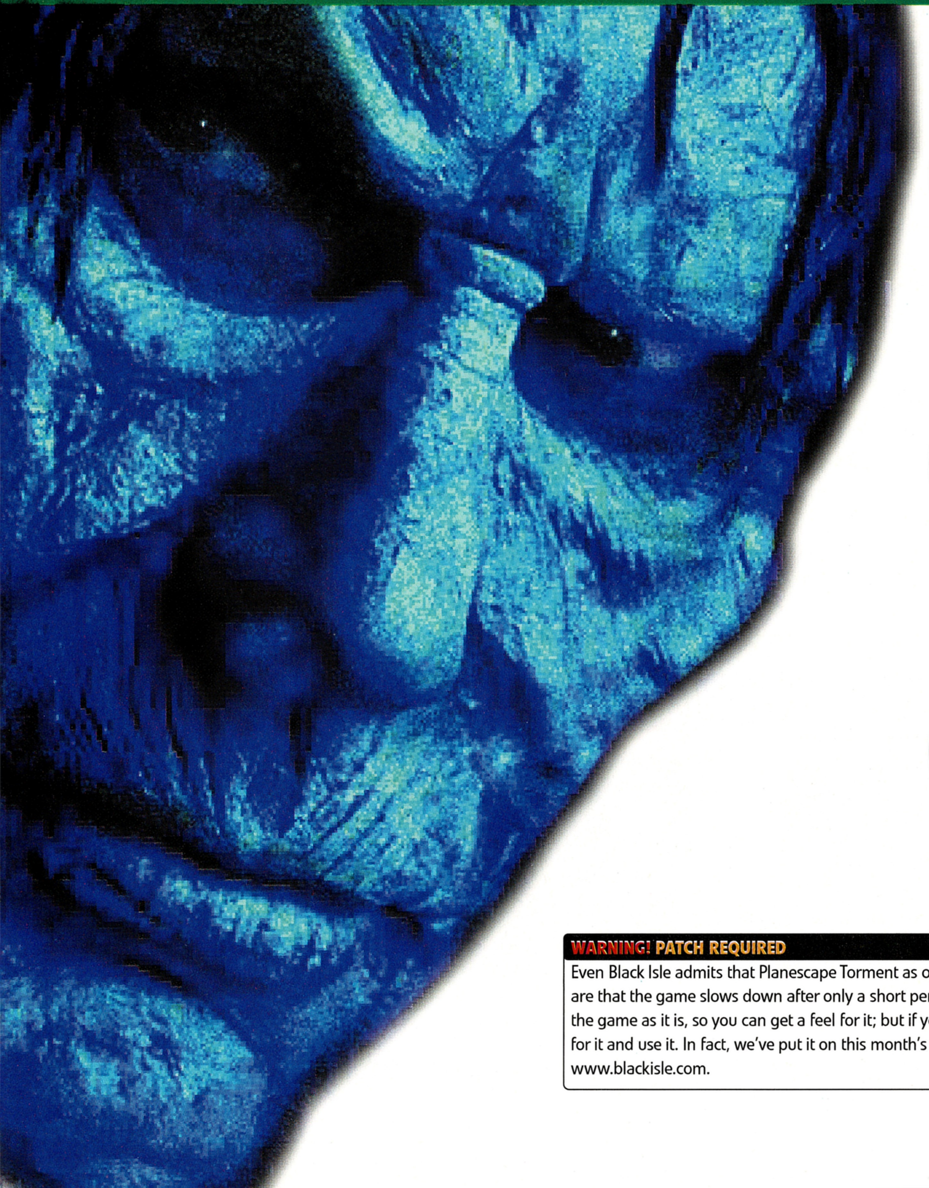
Conclusion An excellent squad based, first person shooter. Would be a definite candidate for a benchmark game except for the inexplicable lack of a multiplayer option

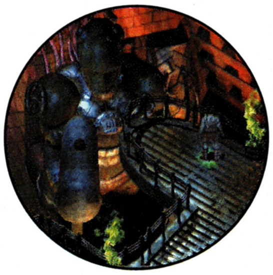
9/10

DEVELOPER: BLACK ISLE PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Pentium 200 MHz • Win 95/98 • 4x CD-ROM • 32Mb RAM • 650 Mb Hard Drive space • 4Mb SVGA Video card • DirectSound compatible sound card • Direct X version 6.0

Barry Ryan explores the labyrinthine alleyways of Sigil, the city at the nexus of the planes

Planescape Torment





Planescape Torment is the latest Role Playing Game from developer Black Isle and publisher Interplay, who have been credited with the re-invention and re-invigoration of the moribund computer RPG market. This they did with Baldur's Gate, a back to basics, honest to goodness, no-nonsense RPG, based on the most recent version of the grand-daddy of all RPGs, Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.

Baldur's Gate, which uses the Infinity engine developed by BioWare, was one of the surprise successes of 1998 and has gathered a loyal and dedicated following. Indeed, so successful was it that one of the most hotly anticipated games of this year has got to be the up and coming Baldur's Gate II – Shadows of Amn.

In an era where graphics accelerator cards now pack more punch than that Desktop PC you bought six months ago, it's refreshing to see that gamers are still capable of suborning their apparently all-consuming lust for eye-candy in favour of more mundane considerations like playability, longevity and narrative excellence.

Many PC gamers have been prejudiced against RPGs and won't have tried Baldur's Gate for themselves, assuming that the

WARNING! PATCH REQUIRED

Even Black Isle admits that Planescape Torment as originally released was flawed. There are a number of problems with it, but the two main ones are that the game slows down after only a short period of play, and you'll be asked to swap disks when you don't actually need to. By all means, try the game as it is, so you can get a feel for it; but if you plan to play it for any length of time, then we strongly advise that you get hold of the patch for it and use it. In fact, we've put it on this month's cover disk. If you haven't got the cover disk any more, then you can download the patch from www.blackisle.com.

game will only appeal to some stereotypical real ale-drinking, roll-your-own smoking, heavily bearded RPG constituency. But the huge crossover success of Baldur's Gate has ensured that a whole new generation of quite-ordinary gamers were introduced to the manifold delights of Role Playing, and now they're hungry for more.

Consequently, Black Isle and Interplay have realised that the gravy train is about to pull out from platform one at Spin Off Central, and have resolved, like the astute market analysts they are, to travel first class. In the next couple of months we're going to see Icewind Dale, Neverwinter Nights and Baldur's Gate II (see box) launched. All of these titles are conventional AD&D to the core and are based in the extremely well-developed Forgotten Realms campaign setting. These titles will build directly on the success of BG1 and will require little introduction (but if you want a quick snapshot of them, see the box below). This is a very sound policy from Black Isle's point of view, and they'll no doubt reap the benefits.

A BREAK FROM TRADITION

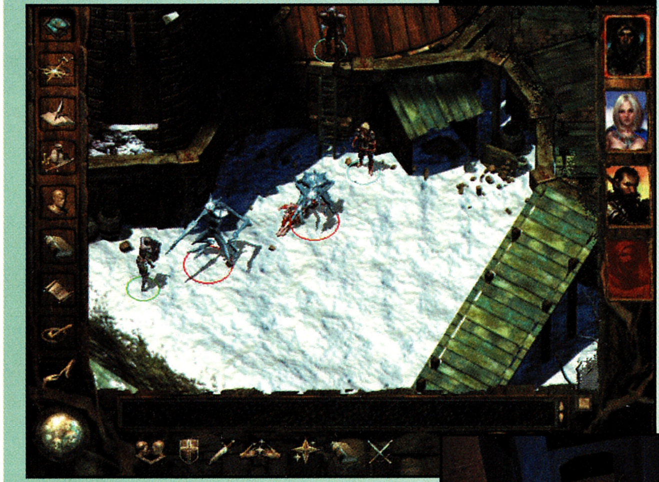
But given the popularity of the AD&D heritage, it was something of a surprise that the first post-BG product from Black Isle was to be Planescape Torment, an RPG set in one of the less well known AD&D gameworlds – Planescape. Planescape is not a traditional role-playing environment. It's a world between worlds, a place which can be entered from certain portals on other AD&D worlds such as Forgotten Realms or Ravenloft. It is a series of dimensional pockets which are linked to a central city, called Sigil. Normal conditions do not prevail, and for the conventional role player, getting out and about in Planescape can initially represent quite a daunting prospect.

If creating characters and outfitting parties of adventurers is your bag, prepare to be a little disappointed initially. You've got a character generation screen, but only one character to play with at the start. You can fiddle about with their attributes – strength, intelligence, dexterity and so on – to fit your particular game playing style or preference. However, all initiates to Planescape will begin as a fighter. You are The Nameless One, so called because you have a number of, shall we say, issues with your identity, past history and general raison d'etre. You'll come to on a slab in a mortuary, with only an apparently insane disembodied skull (yes, disembodied skull) called Morte for a companion. To say that you look a little worse for wear is an understatement. And your physical wretchedness is mirrored by your mental state. In essence, you don't know who you are, why you are, or what you're doing. ▶▶

The RPG market – a new Renaissance?

Not so long ago, the RPG market appeared to be in a state of terminal decline. Gamers, it appeared, just weren't interested any longer. First Person Shooters, with their blend of jaw dropping graphical excellence, frenetic, instantly accessible action and extreme multi-playability appeared to have large portions of the market sown up. Command & Conquer-esque RTS titles and Lara Croft-style platformers accounted for most of the rest. Then along came Baldur's Gate and almost singlehandedly placed the RPG back on the gaming map. Due to its phenomenal success, many more RPG titles are already winging their way to a PC near you and quite a lot of it will be coming out of the Black Isle stable. So here's what they've got in store for us.

Below: Icewind Dale. The BioWare Infinity Engine as used in Baldur's Gate has been considerably tweaked



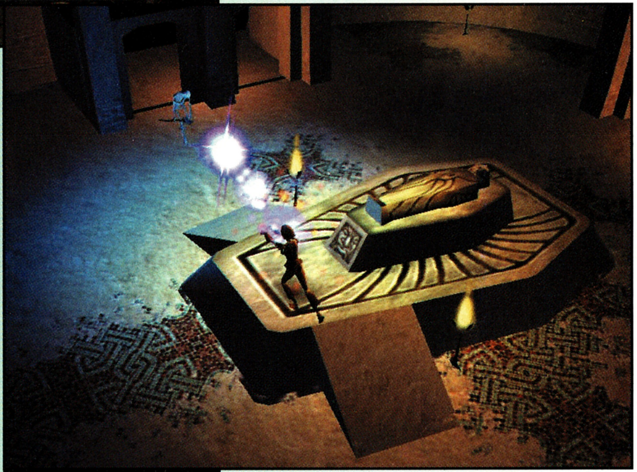
ICEWIND DALE

Icewind Dale will use a modified version of the BioWare Infinity Engine of Baldur's Gate fame. The adventure will be set in The Forgotten Realms gameworld and is based on the Icewind Dale trilogy of books written by Robert Salvatore. It'll use the AD&D Second Edition Rules and is going to take a 'back to basics' approach. You'll be doing a lot of dungeoneering, questing for treasure and the like – in other words, getting right back to the roots of D&D. There will be 50 plus dungeon levels and, tantalisingly, Icewind Dale will bestow full party control from the outset. We'll be able to create the six party members from scratch. It's been a long time since an RPG allowed players to do that, and at least it'll ensure that we'll not be stuck with whinging deadweights as was the case in Baldur's Gate (such as Jaheira). You will, of course, come across a number of NPCs who may join your party for a time. And no, before you ask there will be no dragons on show. Icewind Dale should prove the perfect antidote to post-Baldur's Gate blues and should keep us all happy until BGII is released.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS.

Close your eyes for a minute, sit back and imagine a game which seamlessly combines elements of Baldur's gate, Unreal Tournament, and Dungeon Keeper in one neat package. If you can comfortably envisage this gaming holy grail, you're close to building up a mental picture of Neverwinter Nights. Well, that's the theory anyway and, needless to say, we here at PCSG are very excited indeed by the potential held out by this little gaming venture. Essentially, Neverwinter Nights is three games in one. You can play the game out of the box in single player mode. The stand-alone game promises something between 60 and 100 hours playing time and should provide a gameplay experience similar to Baldur's gate.

Nice as that may seem, that's not really where Black Isle's heart lies on this project. They've conceived and executed the game with an eye firmly on multi-player. You'll be able to create a character, go online, join a party and storm a castle. The game will attempt to re-create the atmosphere of the original AD&D pen and paper gaming experience and the emphasis will be on party co-operation. There will be treasure hunts, quests and even deathmatches. The most fascinating component though, is going to be the Dungeon Master element. You will be able to indulge your powermongering, control freak side through the agency of the wonderfully named 'Solstice Toolset'. This will see you creating entirely new modular worlds and



Above: Using 3rd edition AD&D rules, Neverwinter Nights marks a bold step

continued on page 59. . .

Damon Wilson says... 9/10

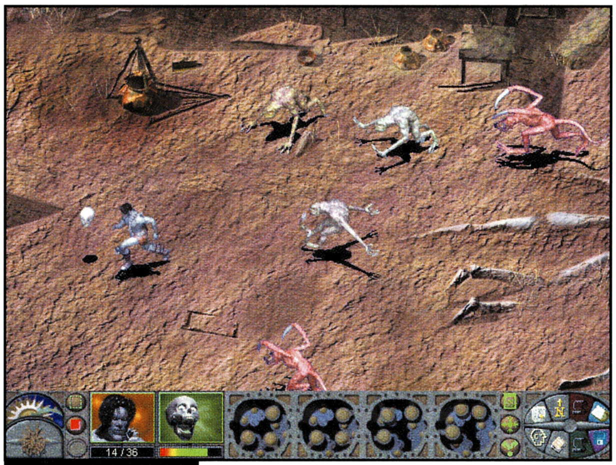
I have to start by admitting that I'm a big fan of Black Isle's previous AD&D, role-play epic, Baldur's Gate. (Barry Ryan introduced me to it the day I met him, and I've lost a large proportion of my spare time to it since). So naturally I had great hopes for Planescape Torment. But my initial reaction to the game was mild disappointment. The plot meanders about and gives the player very little direction, the dialogue sequences just go on and on and, as a result, the game just didn't grip me in the first hour or two of play. Then I remembered that this was exactly what I thought about Baldur's Gate, the first time I played it.

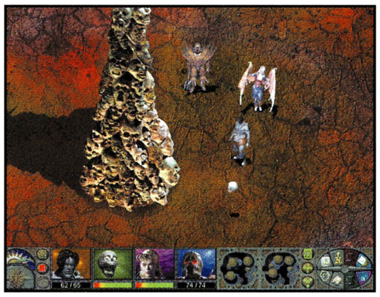
Planescape Torment does indeed share the problems of its predecessor but, just as with Baldur's Gate, these turn out to be its real strengths (given a little persistence by the player). The dialogue sequences seem to go on forever, but you will soon realise that they are actually well written and a pleasure to read. The plot lets you meander about, but it does so quite deliberately – there is a large world to explore and the player can do so in whatever order or play style they fancy.

The whole question of who your character is and why he is unable to stay dead will subtly hook you. Soon you find yourself playing 'just a bit longer' to explore some new adventure possibilities and the next thing you know it's two in the morning and only your mouse hand is capable of moving...

The game world of Planescape Torment is distinctly adult (the first thing you see in the game is a lot of medically mutilated corpses). If you like involved role-play, but found previous PC AD&D jaunts too Tolkien-chintzy, this could be the game for you. I'd only just finished Baldur's Gate – now this comes along. Damn you Ryan! Will I never be free of this addiction?

The best computer RPG available. It's addictive, and you won't have a social life any more





Above: Morte (the skull) and the Nameless One leg it rather than face overwhelming odds **Right:** The party comes face to face with a pillar of skulls

The game revolves around your attempt to resolve this existential crisis by discovering your identity and revealing your past. This is a nice twist on traditional role playing quests. Generally, you've got to defeat the evil tyrant, find the lost artefact, discover the ancient city or such like, but in Planescape, you are the mystery. You are the puzzle that needs to be solved.

GENTLE EVOLUTION

Along the way, you'll encounter bucketloads of subquests, some of which will aid you in the larger main quest and rather a lot of which won't. The game uses a tweaked version of BioWare's Infinity engine, the same beast which powered Baldur's Gate, but the command and control interface has undergone a gentle evolutionary process.

You've still got all the requisite information screens showing your inventory, map and Character stats, and the point and click elements remain almost exactly the same as in BG. But there is now also a very slick pop-up menu which you can access in game, allowing you to call up quick slots, spells, special attributes, inventories etc... easily and painlessly. It's a little cumbersome at first, but you'll soon get the knack.

Torment also employs the spacebar as an instant pause which allows you to stop, consolidate your thoughts and issue orders to your various characters when things get tough. Graphically, it's quite a leap forward from Baldur's gate. Firstly, you'll notice that everything is done on a considerably larger scale. Also, the various gamescapes have a more holistic, organic feel to them. While the maps in Baldur's gate looked good, they suffered from being overly large and substantially under-populated. Torment successfully reverses this trend by providing some of the most atmospheric, vibrant arenas yet seen in a role playing game. The design aesthetic is very, very impressive indeed – a cross between Swiss artist HR Giger (the man behind the look of the original Alien film) and Gaudi (the famous Catalan architect responsible for, well, Barcelona, and fond of organic-looking buildings).

The gamescapes really are very impressive and successfully impart an air of menace and claustrophobia sorely lacking in the rather sterile metropolitan environment of Baldur's Gate.

Ian Delaney says... 9/10

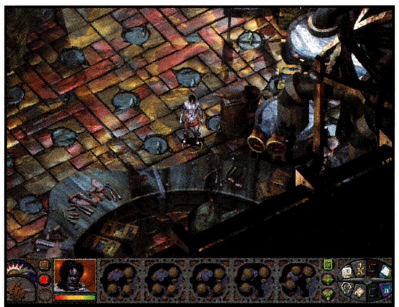
Planescape Torment is a wonderful game. If you like RPGs at all, buy it. You'll love it. Really, that's all that needs to be said. The story is great. The gameplay is great. The characterisation is great. The graphics aren't great, but they're not that bad. Just buy it.

There are some niggles, of course. I disliked the way the game system is skewed towards high-intelligence characters. Certain problems can only be solved by a character with a heroic (17+) intelligence statistic, while the system gives far more experience for problem-solving than it does for combat, so playing a fighter becomes pointless. If you try to play as a Krudd-style barbarian (which suits the artwork) you'll have to fight your way through every situation and you won't be rewarded for it as well as those sneaky wizard-types. This might be more realistic, but it means that the richest roleplaying experience and best rewards are reserved for magic users.

The same thing's true of your character's alignment (moral outlook). Though you can choose to be any of the nine possible alignments in the AD&D system, the game rewards Lawful Good characters better than Chaotic Evil ones. Your main source of experience is completing quests, and the vast majority of these quests are about solving people's problems, putting wrongs to right and other good deeds. To the developer's credit, you do get the option of saying 'What's in it for me?' when you're offered a quest. However, the rewards for doing this are small and this tactic often results in people refusing to talk to you.

It's a fault that's inevitable in computer RPGs. The script has to be tight enough to tell the story or else you end up feeling it's all pointless. But because everything has to be coded into the program, the computer can't adapt itself to every choice real-life players might want to make. That's why people are still playing these games with paper and dice.

The best RPG ever, providing you don't mind the constraints which the game system imposes on you. Deep, thought-provoking, atmospheric



Above: The Nameless One with a nice selection of torture implements

The first thing you'll notice about Torment, aside from the fantastically unusual environment, is that it's far more narrative-led than Baldur's gate. If you're the type of adventurer who likes to spend lots of time interacting with the various denizens of any given game-world, you're going to love Torment. You'll quickly find that talking to characters can be just as rewarding in terms of plot and character development as hacking and slaying everything in sight.

GOOD TO TALK

I'd suggest that if you adopt the traditional sword in the guts first, questions later approach, which tends to pay dividends in many other RPG offerings, you'll be in for a rather frustrating and limited game playing experience. In the surreal world of Planescape Torment, it is indeed good to talk. You'll also encounter a number of NPCs (non-player characters) whom you can co-opt into your band. These NPCs are a variegated and disparate bunch, with widely varying motivations and agendas. You can have up to five companions at any given time. Some will sign on for a short period of time, in order to complete a particular quest or achieve a certain goal. They'll then wander off to pursue their own lives in the Planescape multi-verse.

Sidekicks have a far larger degree of independence than their counterparts in Baldur's Gate. Some will not allow you to mess about with their inventories at will. If they've got a favourite weapon or items of clothing, that's what they're going to wear/use – and if you don't like it, well, tough.

A TOUCH OF CLASS

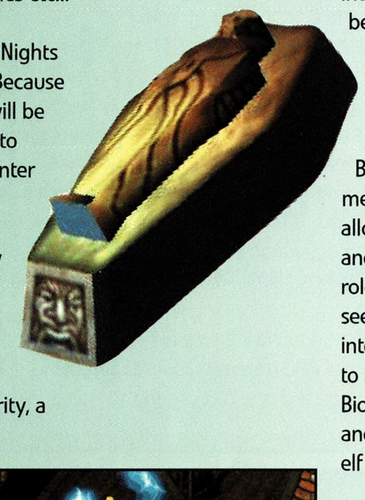
One of the most unsettling aspects of Torment for the traditional role player will be the character class system, or rather lack of one. Your character will begin as a fighter and you will have absolutely no choice in the matter. For one who loves to fiddle about with character creation, classes, races, attributes etc..., this is more than a little off-putting. The manual is also extremely

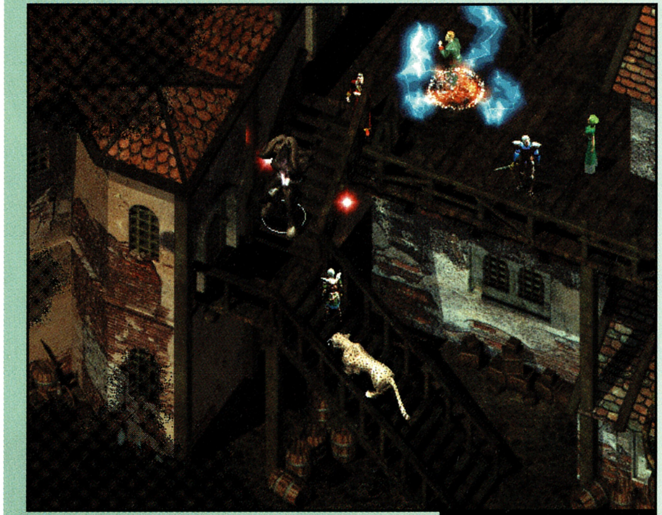
▶▶

The RPG market bursts forth

. . . continued from page 57

presiding over online players as they adventure through them, just as you would in the pen and paper variant. You'll be able to 'possess' (take control of) characters, provide hints and tips, alter storylines etc... Your masterpieces can then be downloaded onto the Neverwinter Nights site and played by other gamers. Because the approach is modular, players will be able to mix and match adventures to create a persistent world. Neverwinter will also use the new 3rd Edition Rules, it'll be set in The Forgotten Realms, there will be Dragons, new races such as half-orcs and new character classes such as assassins, barbarians and monks. If Black Isle can deliver on all of this, then Neverwinter Nights may be that rarity, a genre defining game.





Above: Baldur's Gate II – Shadows of Amn. Loads of new spells, with 3D acceleration to make them really flashy

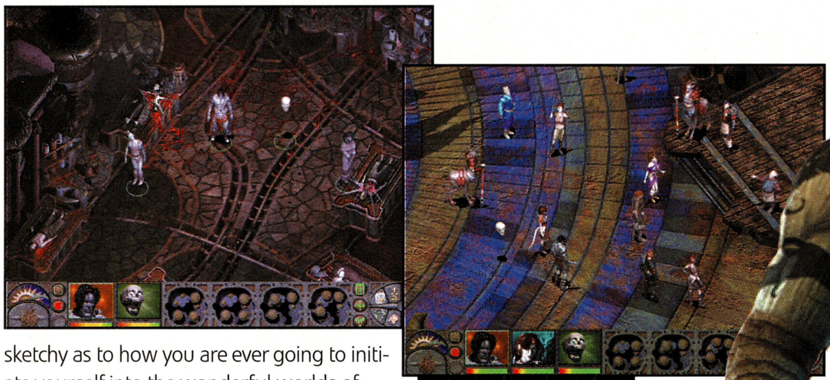
BALDURS GATE II – SHADOWS OF AMN

This is the big one, the one we're all waiting for. BG II will continue from where its predecessor left off. It's set in the Forgotten Realms, along the southern portion of the Sword Coast, in an area known as Amn. It'll use the 2nd Edition AD&D ruleset and will be practically identical to the original in terms of gameplay. It will look better thanks to the addition of open GL support and it's going to be quite a bit larger.

BioWare, who is developing the game as I write, reckons you should be prepared for 100 to 150 hours gameplay. You will be able to import your character from the original, and if you don't fancy that, you'll be able to create a new character from scratch. If you've played the original Baldur's Gate, you might wonder why you'd want to throw away the peerless roleplaying creations who have accompanied you through that game and possibly even the Tales of the Sword Coast add-on pack. I'll tell you why, because BioWare has only gone and included lots of interesting new character kits. You want to be a fighter? Fine, but you've got to choose which kind; a berserker, a wizard slayer or a beast friend (sounds a bit iffy, that one). You want to be a thief? Great, but is that an assassin, Bounty Hunter or Swash Buckler you mean? Kits are a great aspect of AD&D, allowing a flexibility in character creation and generation which enhances the overall roleplaying experience. It's heartening to see that BioWare has incorporated them into BGII. Disappointingly, the only addition to the races on offer will be the half-orc. BioWare hasn't bowed to public pressure and given us a chance to play out our dark elf fantasies by allowing us to play as Drow.

You'll start the game as a level seven or eight character, depending on your class, which is the level you should be if you've finished the original Baldur's Gate with its 89,000 XP (experience point) cap. Incidentally, if you've bought and played through the Sword Coast add-on you'll begin with higher X.Ps (you'll have an effective ceiling of about 161,000). Definitely all the excuse you'll need to procure the expansion pack and to play through the original again. There will be 15 NPCs to encounter, five of whom are culled from the original, and you'll run into other firm favourites such as Garrick and Coran in cameo roles.

After your success in Baldur's Gate, some unspeakable evil has befallen you and your party. You come to caged in a dungeon with Jaheira and Minsc locked up nearby. Naturally, all your equipment and goodies have been stolen. Imoen pops in, releases you, and once again it's time to start adventuring. Baldur's Gate II will see your characters advancing to anything between 17th and 23rd level. There will be lots of new spells, magical items and +monsters, who will eclipse their BGI counterparts in general nastiness, size and detailing. In keeping with AD&D rules, upon reaching a certain level characters will qualify for a stronghold. Druids will shapechange, there will be classes, such as the assassin, who can use two weapons simultaneously and a whole host of other changes which promise to see thousands of gamers jeopardising their relationships, employment prospects and their sanity in pursuit of the elusive shadows of Amn.



Above left: The mortuary, where you begin the game **Right:** The wonderfully diverse denizens of Planescape

sketchy as to how you are ever going to initiate yourself into the wonderful worlds of spell-casting, thievery, clericalism (clericalism?) etc... Rest assured, however, that the game has a very effective and, as far as I'm aware, unique system which will soon see you moving into these specialist areas with ease. Now, in order to tell you about this mechanism, I'm going to have to reveal some of the story. So, if you don't want to preside over the spilling of some beans, look away now...

You, The Nameless One, cannot, for some as yet unknown reason, embrace 'True Death'. Instead, you find yourself in a kind of limbo. Should you die in the course of your adventuring, you'll simply come to on a mortuary slab again, with all your attributes and possessions intact, and you can be on your way. Black Isle tells us that in some parts of the game you're going to need to actively seek out death in order to advance the plot. It soon becomes evident that you have had many different lives and guises. If you can meet with someone who can jog your memory, unlock your recollections of a past life spent say, thieving, suddenly all these skills and attributes will become available to you. You can then play as a thief. The process is the same for wizardry or priest skills. Soon you'll find yourself wandering around as a character who is the last word in multi-classing. Neat, eh? Planescape Torment represents an unorthodox approach to the RPG. If you come to it fresh from Baldur's Gate, you're going to need to recalibrate your mind somewhat. In terms of interface and basic game mechanics it remains practically unchanged, and any changes which have been implemented enhance the overall appeal of the game. It's the gameplay that's going to throw you.

The worse thing you can do is wander about, desperately trying to impose your vision of what an RPG should be on the game. Needless to say, this approach will bear little fruit. Instead, once you allow yourself to slide into the rather comfortable groove provided by Torment, you'll get one of the most playable, in-depth and cerebral role-playing feasts to grace the PC for many a year. PCSG

Barry Ryan says... 9/10

Planescape Torment is an RPG which matches, and in many places exceeds, the exacting standards set by its predecessor and stablemate, Baldur's Gate. Black Isle has taken something of a gamble in releasing a game which embodies such an unorthodox approach to the RPG. The choice of gameworld, AD&D's Planescape multiverse, has, however, proved inspired. Once you get your head round the fact that this does not play or indeed even feel like a traditional RPG, Torment offers an incredibly involved and immersive game playing experience with an excellent narrative framework and a richly layered history.

While you can fight your way to victory, doing so would be singularly unrewarding and self-defeating. No, it's better to communicate and interact with the environment and its denizens. Black Isle has gone to a lot of effort to flesh out the host of interesting NPCs who populate the wonderfully surreal Planescape environment. Consequently this is an RPG which does actually deliver a number of viable modes of play. We've all come across RPGs which trumpet the fact that your weak character with high charisma and sage wisdom will have as much a chance of completing the game as a musclebound Conan the Barbarian type. In reality, however, hack and slay generally wins the day. In Planescape, death is largely irrelevant, and in many cases represents a positive development facilitating the furtherance of your adventuring endeavours. A character with high charisma does get more interaction options than a socially challenged counterpart and this can open up all sorts of new avenues of play.

The character class system is inspired, and while it'll probably raise a few jaundiced eyebrows among the traditional RPG fraternity, it'll soon become obvious that this system isn't simply a stunt but is in fact organic to the games overall aesthetic and style.

Unorthodox RPG done with style and panache. It's got depth, class and charisma in abundance – it's the thinking gamer's Baldur's Gate

PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	8	COMPLEXITY	6
SOUND FX	7	INTERFACE	8
MUSIC	6	MULTIPLAY	n/a
CHALLENGE	9	GAMEPLAY	9
REALISM	3	AI	7

Conclusion Superb. Pushes the boundaries of the RPG genre. You will have to take a completely new approach to the game, though – hack and slay just won't work here

9/10

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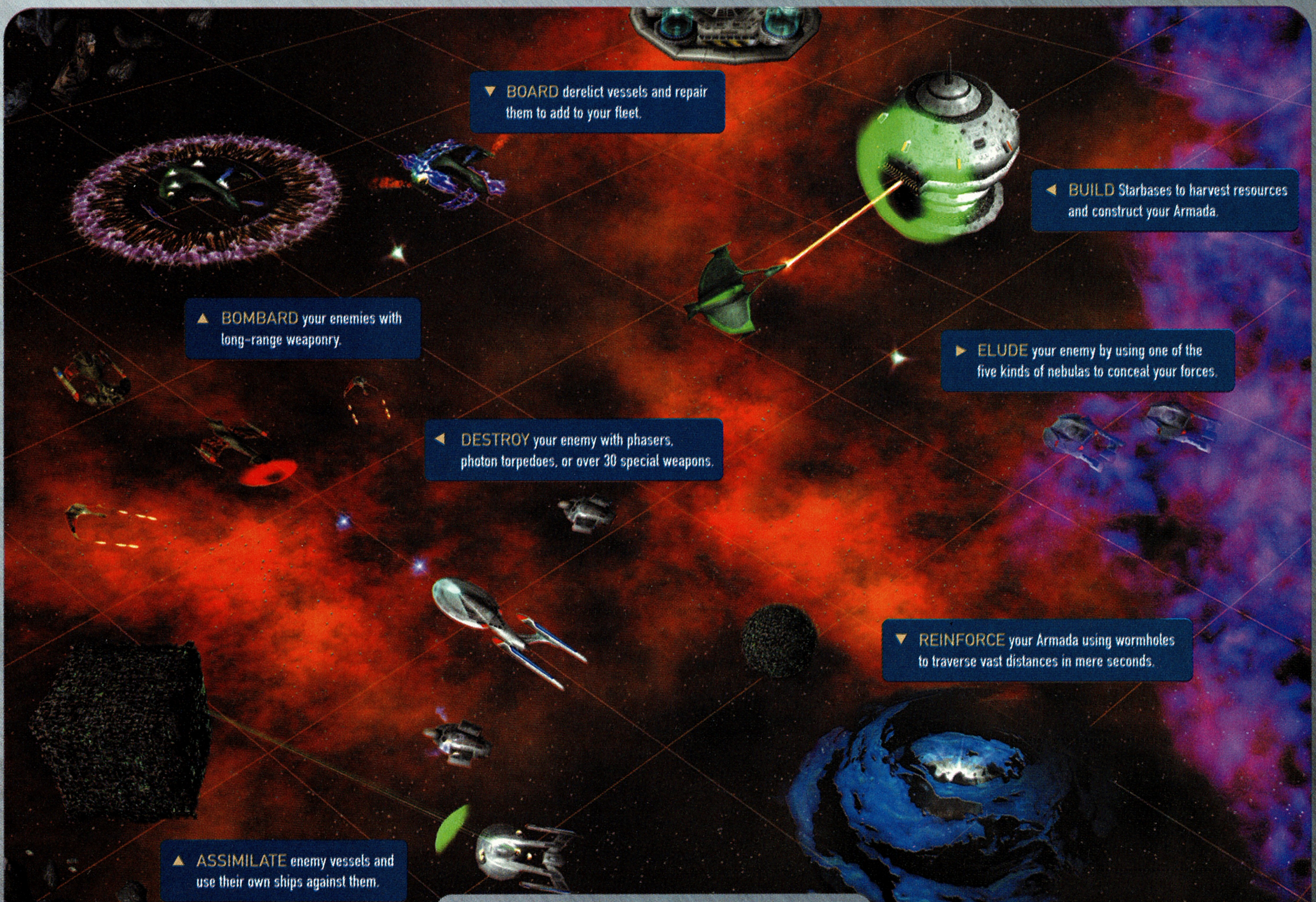

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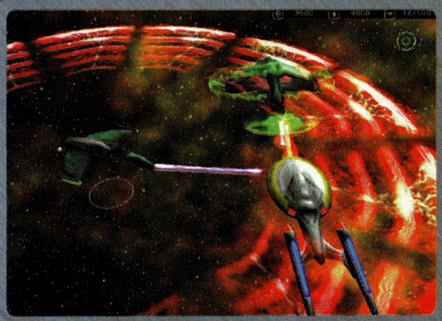

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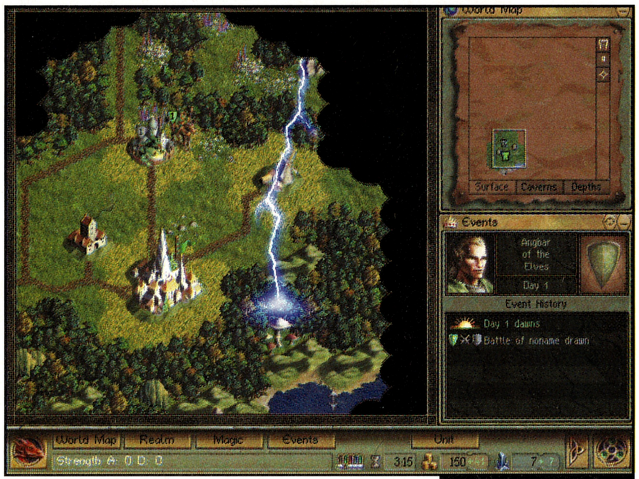
Age of Wonders

It's been a long time comin'. ***Damon Wilson*** *asks if it was worth the wait*

DEVELOPER: **TRIUMPH STUDIOS & EPIC SOFTWARE**
PUBLISHER: **TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE**
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
• Pentium 166MHz • Win 95/98 • 4X CD-ROM • 32Mb RAM • 350Mb Hard Drive space • DirectX compatible Sound and Video cards • Direct X version 6.1

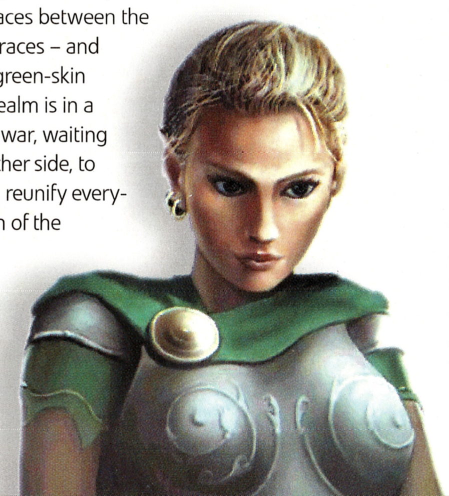


Day 1 dawns
Battle of noname drawn

Above: The spells can be quite spectacular

Ever played any of the Warlord series? Or any of the Heroes of Might and Magic series? I strongly suspect that Triumph Studios, the programmers of Age of Wonders, have played both – a lot. Not that I'm accusing them of plagiarism or anything. It's just that Age of Wonders is very similar to these two cult games. The word 'influence' is probably more appropriate (and less legally actionable).

Age of Wonders is a turn-based, fantasy empire-building game. The background story tells of The Valley of Wonders: a magical realm of elves, dwarves, goblins, orcs, halflings (AKA hobbits) and all the usual, would-be-Tolkien suspects. The Valley was originally united and happy under the rule of the Elven Wizard-King, but a bunch of itinerant humans turned-up one day and killed him (there goes the neighbourhood). The resulting war split the races between the pro-humans – the cute races – and the anti-humans – the green-skin types. Now the whole realm is in a state of suspended civil war, waiting for a great leader, on either side, to fight through the valley, reunify everyone and take possession of the Wizard-King's throne.



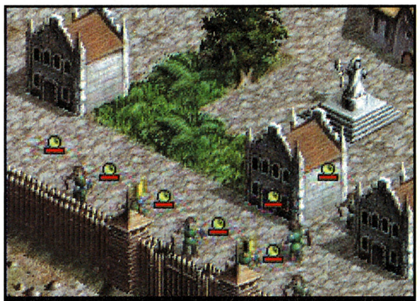
The player can take the side of either light or darkness and plays through a series of scenarios, each corresponding with an area of the valley and a step closer to the throne. The scenarios generally start with the player holding a few units and maybe one town. They have to survive, expand, fight and complete the scenario's objective. The objective is usually to take all the towns, but occasionally it is something like fighting from one side of the map to the other in a limited number of turns – just like Heroes of Might and Magic.

The scenario maps are scattered with neutral and enemy cities. The players plough their armies about, buying the allegiance of the former and conquering the stuffing out of the latter. Alliances can be made and dungeons can be explored for magic weapons –just like Warlords.

Now in any other arm of the entertainment industry, such blatant 'influence' would be worthy of harsh criticism. Yet with computer games, the quality of the player's enjoyment ultimately matters more than the originality of the gameplay and, being so similar to two of the most popular PC fantasy-strategy games in the world, Age of Wonders will find a primed audience waiting. Also, in all fairness, AoW does add some new ingredients to the old mix.

The player starts off with a single hero/leader and, as they win through scenarios, they get the chance to recruit other heroes. As these survive battles, they gain experience points and improve in levels. Again, just like Warlords – but here the list of skills attainable on winning levels is copious and varied. Getting tired of not being able to attack walled towns without a siege engine? You can give the Wall Climbing ability to a hero. Tired of being blocked by mountain regions? Give them the Mountaineering skill. These skills are carried on by your heroes from scenario to scenario (if they survive) and they make an increasing difference as to how you can attack your tasks.

The magic system is also satisfyingly large and has the original twist of insisting that you 'research' new spells to gain them. This happens automatically, but the necessary time varies, depending on how much magical energy the player allocates to the task. The spells themselves are fairly run-of-the-mill for this type of game, falling into Tactical – like Bird's View, which pushes back the fog-of-war – and Battlefield – for example, Solar Flare, which burns enemies to a crisp. There are a lot of them, however (over a hundred, in fact) and all the battlefield spells have nice animations. Again, player choice over which spells to research can give a good customised feeling to your fighting forces. Town management is a major part of winning scenarios in age of Wonders. All



Above: Battlefield graphics work well

MARK SHAW SAYS... 5/10

Don't expect to be surprised by Age of Wonders – it engenders many emotions, but that isn't one of them. It plays, sounds and looks much as you'd expect any fantasy-inspired game to do. The cutesy animations help foster empathy with the characters, but after hours (and hours) of gameplay, you can't help but feel sorry for the little guys – they must get so bored, performing the same actions over and over (and over) again. While the explore and management side of the game is adequate if somewhat simple, the battle system is fundamentally flawed. Combat is best described as Command & Conquer goes turn-based, with magic spells providing a touch more spice. Unfortunately, each battle takes an age to complete – and there are a lot of them: the hours of redundant time are enough to cause serious existential angst (Why are we here? Why do we fight?). Sanctioning the AI to fight battles on your behalf to speed things up removes the vital tactical element and guarantees increased losses. It's the worst of both worlds – a shame, as the first hours of play held such promise.

Provides literally hundreds of hours of gameplay, but only the first three are enjoyable. Let down by fundamentally flawed battle system

DAMON WILSON SAYS... 7/10

If you remember last issue, I held forth - over several pages – on the subject of the paucity of imagination in fantasy PC games. I hate all the sub-Tolkien, Dungeons & Dragons clones that are clogging the shelves. So, naturally, I get the task of reviewing Age of Wonders: a game that happily revels in cute elves, wicked goblins, burrowing dwarves and throttle-able halflings... and I was pleasantly surprised.

The game is challenging, and subtly complex: even the beginning scenarios are damn hard to complete. If the player doesn't mind the unimaginative fantasy background, they could get a lot of decent playing out of AoW.

My main complaint is over the control system, which has a few stupid glitches. For example, units do not unselect when they run out of movement points. A simple, but very annoying oversight, as units stick to you like tar-babies.

Also watch the load game option – it will scrub the save if you let it... Considering this game was in production for five years, the designers could have ironed out these problems.

Too hard for kids, but too Tolkien-sugary for adults – I said that about Heroes of Might and Magic and Warlords – look how popular they are

IAN DELANEY SAYS... 6/10

You won't buy AOW for its original ideas. It's a mish-mash of games you've seen before. The world map and campaign structure comes from the Heroes of Might and Magic series. The combat and magic system resembles Master of Magic. You won't buy it on the basis of its presentation, either. While the graphics are attractive, they were drawn for a standard VGA resolution. Pump up the resolution to take advantage of your snazzy graphics card, and you can't tell your slingers from your swordsmen. Hand-painted art is nice, but only at the settings the designers intended it for. Your new sound card won't really be stretched either. The music is inoffensive, but individual sound effects are pretty poor. AOW looks and sounds like a five-year old game.

None of this really matters, of course. Fantasy strategy games have a noble tradition of borrowing. This game doesn't bring anything new to the genre – but maybe that's a strength: it's not broken so don't fix it. View the game as the inheritor of a tradition rather than an innovative usurper and you won't be disappointed.

Not an original idea in sight, but pretty playable for all that. Get past the old-fashioned graphics, and you can have some fun with it

---

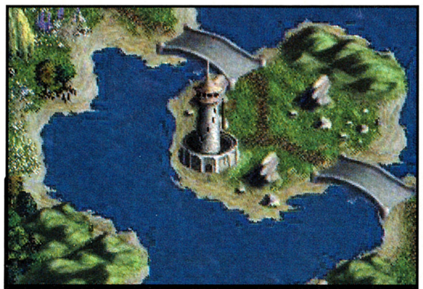
your units come from towns, and a bewildering array can be obtained (over 130 types in the whole game), depending on race and the capability of the town to tool them up. Conquered races will naturally be a bit bolshie, but will eventually get to like you if you treat them to town upgrades and fortifications.

Alternatively, you can ethnically cleanse them: moving in a race more prone to your side. Naturally this will make you unpopular with the evicted race, but there is no Valley of Wonders War Crimes Commission to worry about. But it's in the battles that Age of Wonders sets itself over and above its two cult predecessors. If the player is in a hurry he can set a conflict to automatic, but his forces will almost certainly fare worse than if human controlled. Given lots of time, it's well worth commanding every battle personally. The full strategic option presents the player with an isometric map of whatever terrain type the two opposing forces met upon (road, grassland, swamp, cavern, besieged town etc).

The units are individuals rather than platoons and an army can only contain a maximum of eight units, but a clever support rule has been added to beef things up.

Fighting is turn-based, units moving a set number of steps and/or attacking enemies in range. Terrain impedes movement and can shield units from magic and missile fire. Spells can be slung – offensive, defensive and summoning. All the sort of things that the experienced fantasy gamer would expect, but the maps are big and varied, giving lots of room for complex strategies.

I found that the Age of Wonders battles most reminded me of the ancient ZX Spectrum classic Chaos: simple and down-to-earth, but challenging fun.



Above: Scenario maps are complex

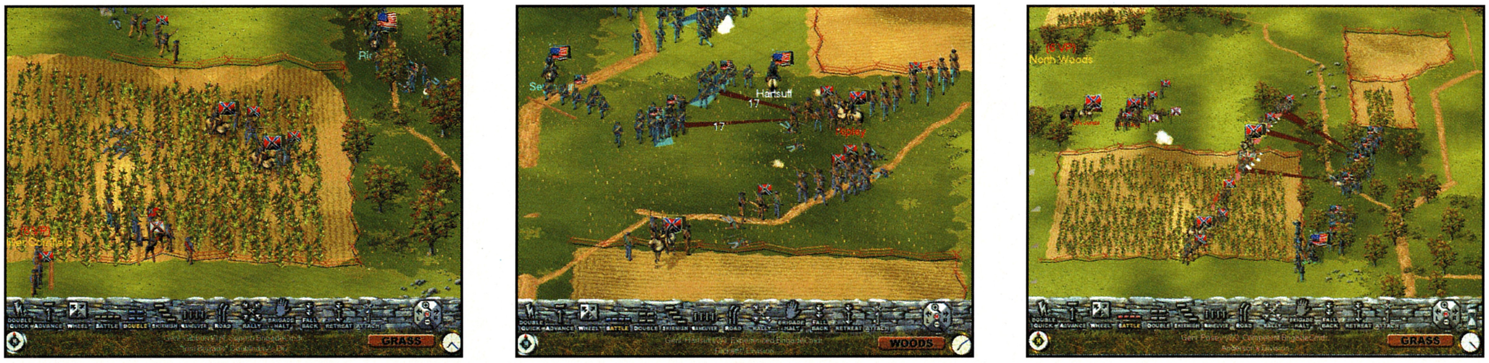
Age of Wonders is most certainly hackneyed and unoriginal in some ways, nevertheless, it is well-programmed, graphically pretty and demanding enough to please the legion of Warlord/Heroes of Might and magic fans, as well as anyone else willing to give it a chance. PCSG.

PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	8	COMPLEXITY	6
SOUND FX	6	INTERFACE	5
MUSIC	7	MULTIPLAY	7
CHALLENGE	6	GAMEPLAY	6
REALISM	6	AI	7

Conclusion Graphically pretty, with demanding, if repetitive, battles and reasonable enemy AI, but off-puttingly unoriginal in gameplay and fantasy background

6/10



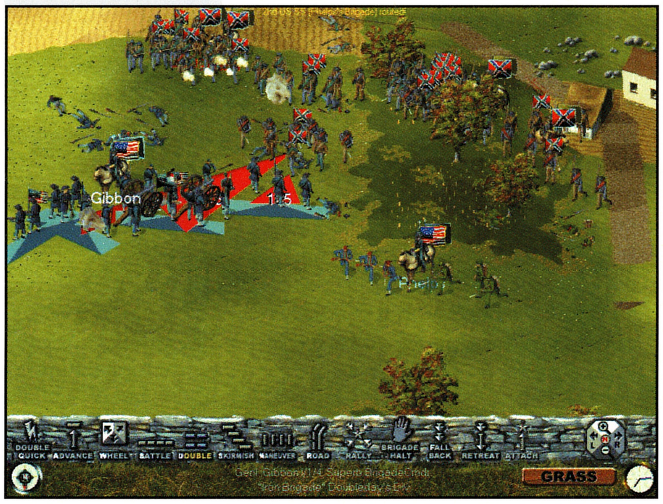
Above left to right: The battle for Villier's Cornfield. Johnny Reb slowly pushes Billy Yank out of the maize

***Barry Ryan** takes a hard look at Sid Meier's latest American Civil War game*

Antietam!

Sid Meier's Gettysburg! should have been the game which revolutionised American Civil War (ACW) gaming. Up to the point of its release, practically all ACW games were turn based, hex driven affairs, amounting to little more than table top wargaming ported to the PC. Gettysburg! seemed set to shake up the status quo by introducing real time game mechanics couched in a nice graphics engine. The game sold well, but not as well as Firaxis would have liked. There are a number of theories as to why this was so. They range from the conservative, traditional nature of the ACW fraternity, to the suggestion that a lot of people seemed bemused by the fact that Sid Meier, a name synonymous with titles such as Civilisation and Alpha Centauri, should have created a civil war game.

Other prospective buyers were put off by the fact that this game might possibly represent ACW lite rather than the hardcore simulations so beloved of the core wargaming constituency. In reality nothing could have been further from the truth. Gettysburg! was an excellent wargame which introduced a series of long overdue innovations into the genre. It managed to combine the instant accessibility and addictive playability of RTS with the depth and complexity of traditional wargaming titles. Undaunted by the relatively cool reception for Gettysburg, Firaxis has now published Sid Meier's **Antietam!** using a modified version of the game engine utilised in Gettysburg!



Below: The rebels advance – but Union guns await

The battle of Antietam took place on September 17th, 1862. 50,000 Confederate troops, led by General Robert E Lee, attempted an invasion of the North. They were met at Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland, by 70,000 Union troops under George McClellan. The battle raged over the course of one day and became one of the bloodiest encounters of the American Civil War. The Union army suffered 12,000 casualties, including 2,108 killed. On the confederate side, Lee lost approximately 25% of his force: 2,700 were killed and over 10,000 were declared wounded or missing.

As a result of the encounter, Lee withdrew across the Potomac and handed the North its first (rather Pyhrric), victory over the South.

Graphically, Antietam looks practically identical to Gettysburg. It's been sharpened up a little and appears more refined, but anyone who has played its predecessor will find it instantly recognisable.

The game mechanics have, however, been tweaked considerably. Both the Union and Confederate armies have acquired some new features. Firstly the staid uniformity of the opposing armies is gone. In Gettysburg it was strictly a case of the blue and the grey. Antietam introduces a number of new units on the Union side including the green clad Sharpshooters and the outrageously elegant Zouave units, whose uniforms were all the rage at this point in the Civil War. The Confederates have also acquired a non-standard look, reflecting the great diversity of uniform types which Rebel troopers tended to sport.

MORE UNITS, MORE FIREPOWER

There's also a bewildering array of artillery units to choose from. All in all, there are eight types (as opposed to two in the original), ranging from 10 and 20 pounder Parrot rifles all the way up to the hefty firepower provided by the 32 pounder howitzers. Interestingly, Firaxis have also included mixed batteries, with a variety of calibres contained within a single artillery unit.

There's a new command and control bar which appears as a stone wall across the bottom of the screen. Underneath that, there's the status bar, which will tell you the type of ground the selected unit occupies and the morale of that particular unit. The sequence of orders is different from the command bar in Gettysburg! Artillery units are now capable of firing devastating short range canister (rounds composed of nails and other assorted odds and ends, designed to inflict maximum damage on massed infantry ranks) barrages at approaching

DEVELOPER: BREAKAWAY GAMES
PUBLISHER: FIRAXIS
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Pentium 133 MHz • Win 95/98 • 2xCD-ROM • 32Mb RAM • 70 Mb Hard Drive space • 1Mb Video card • Direct X compatible sound card • Direct X version 7.0

MARTIN CROFT SAYS... 8/10

Heresy – despite being a lover of American Civil War wargames, I never played Sid Meier's Gettysburg! (though one of the developers did demo it to me). So to an extent, I've come to his latest game, Antietam!, something of a neophyte. Which is nice, as it means I can look at it without worrying about baggage I might be bringing with me from the previous one. I have to say, I liked it. The command system takes a bit of getting used to – I kept on not managing to click on the next unit properly, so I'd end up just countermanding the last unit's orders, but no more so than any other game. In fact, in many ways it's a lot less cumbersome than most of the other Civil War games I've played. Visually, it's superb, with a map that's aesthetically pleasing without detracting from gameplay. The units are great – check out Johnny Reb's trousers, and you'll see a variety of different colours, from grey through butternut to blue. Such detail!

If you like wargames, then Antietam! should offer an excellent bridge between RTS and turn based games. Yee-haw!

DAMON WILSON SAYS... 7/10

When Sid Meier's Gettysburg! came out I was delighted. After years of terrible American Civil War games, here was something that had an easy interface, decent isometric (rotatable) graphics and involving gameplay. As you may guess, I had found all previous attempts at depicting that conflict too opaque and, frankly, badly programmed to keep my attention. With his usual aplomb, Sid Meier and his team at Firaxis showed that the subject could be presented with style as well as depth. Sid Meier's Antietam! thrills me rather less, I'm afraid. This is not because it is worse than Gettysburg! Indeed, its subtle tweaks to the AI, the multitude of new units and the excellent background history to the battle make it a decent successor. When all's said and done, however, I feel Antietam! hasn't moved on far enough from Gettysburg! I'm not demanding 3D views and the like, but the game-engine is beginning to show its age now.

A game for willing newcomers and ardent fans of the original. Others may find the presentation too dull by modern standards

BARRY RYAN SAYS... 9/10

Sid Meier's Antietam! is, for my money, the cream of the ACW crop. There are two very good reasons for this: firstly, it is a serious wargame in all respects. The battlefield has been recreated using contemporary cartography, with all the historical units present. The game mechanics have been significantly tweaked, with improved AI, an up-rated command and control system and new unit types. Secondly, Antietam! (like Gettysburg before it) rewrites the rule book when it comes to ACW gaming. This is achieved by the simple addition of a real time game engine to the mix, more usually associated with games such as the Command and Conquer or Warcraft Series that are certainly not regarded as serious strategy wargaming fare. Antietam!, however, seamlessly incorporates real time elements. It manages to combine the fast and furious action associated with RTS with the more cerebral challenges of traditional wargaming.

The best ACW game out there bar none. More than a sequel to Gettysburg!, Antietam! is a benchmark game in its own right

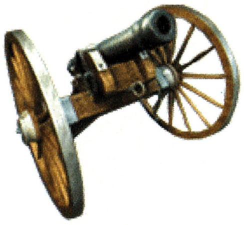
infantry. The system for ordering infantry to fire volleys has been simplified. In Gettysburg!, you needed to select volley, wait until a unit of infantry came into range, and then click it again to fire. Now it's a one click system. Your units, when using the volley command, will wait patiently until a target presents itself and fire of their own volition. The combat system has been bolstered by the addition of fire arrows. When you select a unit, not only will you be able to immediately ascertain the unit they're firing on, you'll also be able to see who's firing on them. There's also two new unit levels. We've now got some units of elite troops (one step above veteran) at our disposal and one or two commanders on the field have 'legendary' status which increases their ability to affect the morale of soldiers positively, and ensures that their orders will be carried out with greater dispatch.

As in the original, the background research into the battle has been exhaustive. The battlefield is actually modelled on a map drawn by US army cartographers in 1867, only five years after the battle, and as such is about as accurate a representation as you could hope for. Other factors have been incorporated to reflect actual battlefield conditions on the day. Antietam Creek, and, more importantly, the attempt at crossing it, exerted a powerful effect over the outcome of the battle. It can only be crossed at bridges and fords, which can create bottlenecks where troops (who are forced to cross in columns) can be subjected to devastating fire by the enemy. The Union forces suffered horrendous casualties while attempting to cross at Burnside's Bridge. Both sides also experienced great difficulty in actually locating the fording points and this is reflected in the game. The Potomac, across which Lee withdrew, appears only in the North-West corner of the map and as such does not feature prominently in the battle. The sunken road, known as 'Bloody Lane', scene of some of the fiercest fighting, also makes an appearance. Troops positioned here will receive a high entrenchment rating and will prove very, very difficult to root out. The game also contains a copy of Ezra A Carman's Battle History. Carman spent years researching the battle and produced a 1,800 page manuscript, detailing its ebb and flow.

HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Antietam! is a worthy successor to Gettysburg! The temptation for Firaxis must have been to graft a different battlefield onto precisely the same engine. However, Antietam! represents a significant step forward from its predecessor. The high standards of historical accuracy, complexity and authenticity set by Gettysburg! have been maintained. Indeed, the inclusion of Carman's history means that this game sports one of the most comprehensive battle histories ever packaged with a war game.

Antietam's upgraded command and control system, complete with the timely addition of fire arrows, ensures that the trend of accessibility and user friendliness started by Gettysburg! is continued. If you've been put off ACW gaming by its staid, perhaps even boring, image, this is the game that's most likely to convert you. If you've shied away from Meier's ACW outings in the past, believing them a little facile, a couple of hours playing Antietam! will convince you that it's possible to graft a real time engine onto a traditional subject without compromising the factors which are essential to a quality wargaming experience. PCSG.



PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	6	COMPLEXITY	5
SOUND FX	7	INTERFACE	8
MUSIC	8	MULTIPLAY	6
CHALLENGE	8	GAMEPLAY	8
REALISM	9	AI	8

Conclusion Antietam! is a classy, extremely playable wargame. It's got good AI, decent graphics and the real time engine works a treat. It's got to be the ACW game of choice for the discerning gamer.

8/10

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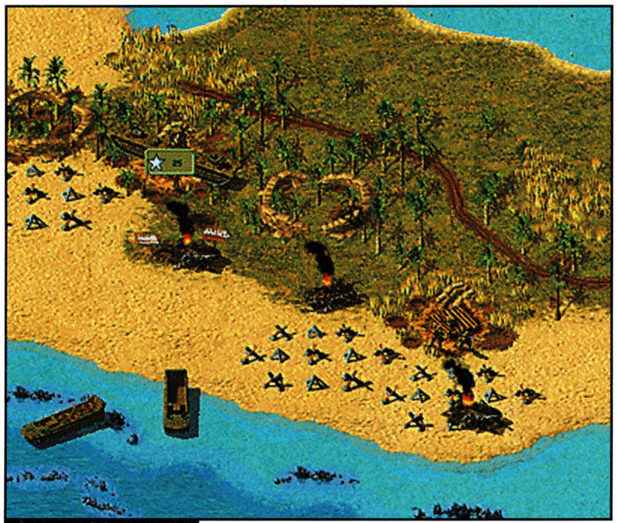
Rising Sun

Fun in the Pacific with Talonsoft's latest, asks ***Martin Croft****?*

DEVELOPER: TALONSOFT PUBLISHER: TAKE 2 INTERACIVE
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
• Pentium 200 Mhz or higher • Win 95/98 • 4xCD-ROM • 32Mb RAM (64Mb recommended) • 115Mb free HD space • 16 bit High Colour Video card • Microsoft compatible mouse



Above: Life's a beach, as the US Marines storm ashore again

Rising Sun is the latest in Talonsoft's Campaign series of World War II wargames. As with most of Talonsoft's products, it's a two player, turn-based and hex-based wargame which features scenarios drawn from major battles in the Pacific between 1941 and 1945.

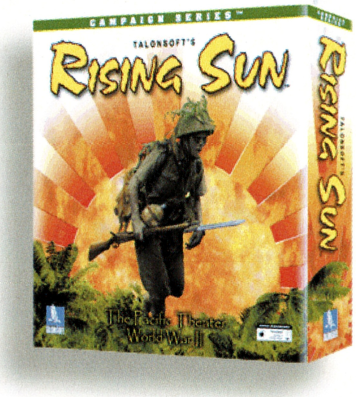
If you've played either of the previous games in the campaign series – Eastern Front or Western Front — then you'll have a good idea of what to expect. For anyone who isn't familiar with Talonsoft's existing Campaign games, here's a brief overview. You will control either the Japanese or the Allied forces. You have at your disposal a variety of units which will include infantry squads, individual officers, tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles, and, in some scenarios, boats and amphibious vehicles.

The map is covered with a hexagonal grid, which regulates movement and combat. How far a unit will be able to move in a turn depends on what sort of terrain is in the hexes being entered.

VIEW TO A KILL

There are five different views possible: 2D close-up and normal view, 3D close-up and normal view, and jump map. The 2D views show the battlefield as if it were a traditional hex-based board wargame, with units as counters with the accepted NATO unit designations indicating their type (rectangles with crosses in for infantry, rectangles with black spots in for artillery etc). In the 3D mode, you see a graphic representation of the landscape, while the units appear as model soldiers, vehicles or guns. The jump map is just used for moving around a large battlefield swiftly.

Each turn, you will be able to give orders to the units at your disposal. Each unit has a certain number of action points, and the various different actions you can order them to perform – moving, firing, getting into or out of vehicles – each take a set number of points. Different terrain will also cost different amounts to move into. Finally, weather can also play a part, with fog or heavy rain likely to slow down movement and restrict lines of sight. Once you've spent all your points, you move on to the next unit; once all units have spent all their points, your turn ends.



Movement is conducted by selecting the unit to move, and then either right clicking where you want them to move to or dragging and dropping.

Unlike some other wargames, units do not automatically have the ability to fire on enemy units: if you spend your whole action point allowance on moving, then you can't shoot. On the other hand, you could shoot twice in a turn, if you were happy with where your units were. Also, you could move a unit, fire, and then move again.

Assuming you have enough points to fire on an enemy, then doing so is relatively simple. You click on the unit to fire, then right click on the enemy unit. You'll get a sound effect of gunfire, and you'll see a graphic of bullets (or shells) hitting the enemy unit. The other form of combat is melee, which you initiate by moving into an enemy hex.

Units which take losses from being fired on or engaged in melee can become disrupted (in which case they can't move closer to enemy units, and will be less effective in combat), forced to retreat or be destroyed.

If you want a unit to advance carefully, then it's worth moving it one hex at a time, as otherwise the computer seems to take the path of least action point cost – which may mean you expose yourself to enemy fire, or don't search a particular hex you want to check out. Your unit's movement will be interrupted if an enemy unit decides to take a pot-shot at you.

In addition to direct fire, some of your

MARTIN CROFT SAYS... 8/10

I love wargames, and yes, I'm quite happy to spend a whole day pushing little lead figures around a sandpit. But I have to recognise that Rising Sun will not be to everyone's taste: in fact, it's in many ways such an unattractive package, that those who aren't dedicated wargamers will be put off by it from the start. That would be a pity, because for all its problems – clunky interface and poor graphics being the main ones – it's actually about as good as it gets when it comes to hex and turn based wargames. It's aimed at a niche market who won't be out off by its foibles, but to others it will seem incredibly dated and lacking in excitement. It's good that someone is still making games like this, because they offer an intellectual challenge you just don't find in the latest C&C clone; but even I recognise that its appeal will be limited, and that it's not accessible to a wider gaming audience.

Good solid wargame for a core audience of military history buffs. Not one for the masses, though – too inaccessible

DAMON WILSON SAYS... 4/10

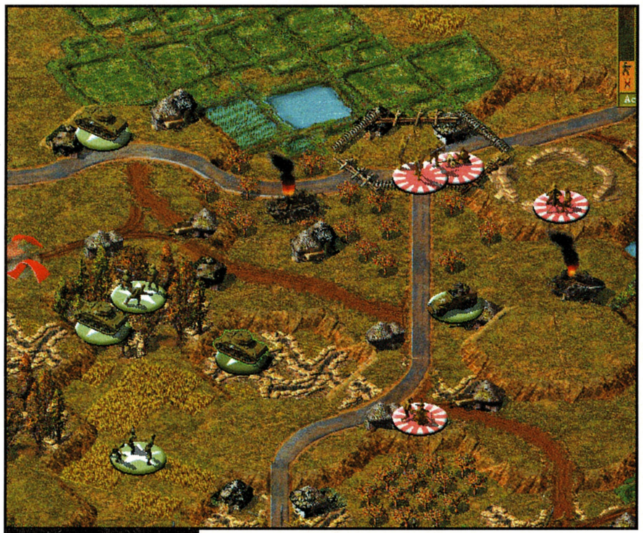
As you'll know if you've already read my opinion box on Sid Meier's Antietam!, I don't much like hex-based, tabletop battle games. I can live with the clumping interfaces, the fundamental lack of realism, even the muddy graphics and the buggy programming, but why do almost all of these sort of games have to be so slooow? Unfortunately, Rising Sun suffers from all of the above – especially the slowness. Every shot is pedantically tracked, every unit has to be moved individually and the AI turns seem to take forever. Granted, you can play the game in 2D mode, which makes it much quicker – but then you don't get to see the graphics. Actually, maybe that's a plus. It's all very disappointing, because a lot of us have been hoping to see a good WWII Pacific game for a long time – refighting the European fronts all the time is getting dull. Sadly, we'll have to wait a bit.

A game for wargames obsessives and those with infinite patience and no other opportunities for entertainment

BARRY RYAN SAYS... 7/10

Talonsoft has a reputation for creating wargames for wargamers. There's no compromise for them, and Rising Sun is no exception. It's good to see a game on the Pacific in WW2 for a change – it's a theatre which has always played second fiddle to Europe and North Africa in game terms. Talonsoft has incorporated a 3D view which looks pretty, but any time spent playing will quickly reveal that this is merely a front. At heart, this is still very much a traditional 2D turn based wargame of the kind Talonsoft has been doing, and doing well, for years. If you've played any of the previous offerings in the Campaign series, you'll be instantly at home. This is the great Talonsoft paradox as far as I'm concerned: very competent, complex, historically accurate wargames catering to a niche market. This market will love this game and buy it almost sight unseen.

Rising Sun is a good traditional wargaming experience which should appeal to Talonsoft junkies everywhere



Above: Rice paddies make for difficult terrain for tanks and troops

units will have indirect fire capability (usually mortars, some artillery and naval guns). You can order direct fire attacks through the artillery dialogue box. Be careful, though: you are calling in artillery strikes for next turn, so make sure you don't accidentally bombard a hex you may have units in – the artillery dialogue is fiddly, and it's easy to target the wrong hex. Similarly, you can call in air-strikes, but you have to be careful you follow the process correctly.

Each unit has a variety of attributes, the most important of which are strength, defence and morale. As units get damaged in combat, they will lose strength points. When they reach zero, they will be eliminated. At the same time, every time they are shot at and suffer losses, there is a chance that their morale will break and they will become disrupted, which means they can't move closer to the enemy.

Each scenario lasts a set number of turns, and the winner will be the side which controls the most victory hexes, which will be scattered across the map and will have various values.

When you are choosing a scenario - there are 40 included in Rising Sun — you will be able to sort them according to name, the individual who designed them or difficulty rating, or by campaign. There is also a scenario designer and map editor, both of which should probably only be tackled by more advanced players, and a battle generator, which will create non-historical scenarios for you (a rather neat touch).

Finally, you can play the game either against the computer or two player; if you are playing against another human, then you can do so either by modem, by e-mail or by hot seat.

One word of warning: Rising Sun, like East Front and West Front, will change the colour of your desktop to an unattractive olive drab. The only way to change it back seems to be to restart the machine.

However, some of the other major problems with East Front and West Front appear to have been addressed, particularly extreme slowness. At least in Rising Sun there is an option to speed things up, although it does look a bit silly when units zip across the map. And the AI seems to be somewhat better: in East Front the computer had a habit of charging command units forward and getting them blown away. PCSG.

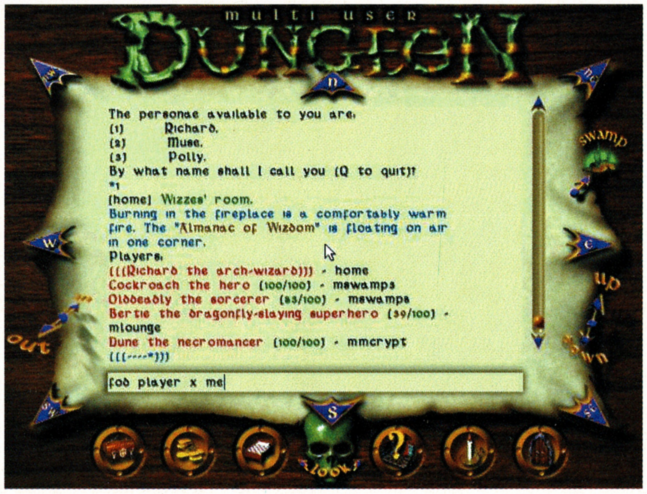
PC STRATEGY GAMES THE VERDICT

GRAPHICS	6	COMPLEXITY	9
SOUND FX	7	INTERFACE	n/a
MUSIC	8	MULTIPLAY	6
CHALLENGE	n/a	GAMEPLAY	6
REALISM	8	AI	n/a

Conclusion If you're a hard-core wargamer, you'll love this. But if you're not, you'll probably find it inaccessible in the extreme

6/10

Mud



```
The personae available to you are:
(1)      Richard.
(2)      Muse.
(3)      Polly.
By what name shall I call you (Q to quit)?
*1
[home] Wizzes' room.
Burning in the fireplace is a comfortably warm
fire. The "Almanac of Wizdom" is floating on air
in one corner.
Players:
[[[Richard the arch-wizard]]] - home
Cockroach the hero (100/100) - mswamps
Olddeadly the sorcerer (83/100) - mswamps
Bertie the dragonfly-slaying superhero (39/100) -
mlounge
Dune the necromancer (100/100) - mmcrypt
[[[----*]]]

fod player x me
```

Above: The creator of the original Multi User Dungeon (MUD), Richard Bartle, playing with himself

You've probably never heard of Dr Richard Bartle: but there is a small group of dedicated online games players for whom he is, or was, quite simply, a god. After all, Bartle was mainly responsible for the creation of what many historians of the games industry believe was the world's first true online computer game, MUD – Multi User Dungeon – back in the early 1980s. And, as programmer, sysop and super-user in that game, he could decide who lived and who died...

And, 20 years on, the direct descendant of that game, MUD 2, was until the end of last year alive and well, running on Compuserve under the name British Legends. Hosted continuously by Compuserve from 1985 to 1999, it holds the record for the longest running online game ever – not bad for a text-based adventure game.

HEAR NO EVIL, SEE NO EVIL

Yes, that's right: a text-based adventure game. No graphics, no sound effects, no scary music, no blood. Just words. And people still want to play it. Ask Bartle why, and the answer that comes back is just one word: "Community. It's the players that make an online game – and with some games, it's the players who break them."

In fact, you can still play MUD 2 in various places, including Gameplay.com, and dedicated MUD fans are hard at work developing a new version of the game right now.

Bartle is not always happy with the adulation he receives from his fans, however. For example, some years ago, Bartle was speaking at a conference on online gaming. After he'd given his address, he sat down and the next speaker – the founder and chief executive of a £100 million game developer – stepped to the podium.

Bartle recalls: "He got to the microphone and said: 'Before I start my speech, I'd just like to tell you all that without Richard Bartle, none of us would be here today...'

Wrestling

Martin Croft *gets to grips with Richard Bartle, head of game design for Gameplay.com and the man credited by some with creating the whole online gaming industry*

And he went on like that for about five minutes. It was horribly embarrassing. I just sat there hunched up in my chair with my hands over my face and everybody looking at me."

Incidentally, that CEO had been, as a precocious teenager, one of the stars of the original MUD, back when it was running for free on the University of Essex's DEC 10 mini-computer.

But isn't it true? Didn't the commercialisation of MUD, back in 1985, pave the way for the online gaming industry of today (or tomorrow, more accurately). Bartle cogitates for a moment, then reluctantly admits: "I suppose so. But if it hadn't been me, it would have been someone else."

He is also quick to make sure that others get the credit due to them: for example, although his is the name most people would associate with MUD, he stresses that the original idea, and the original programming, was done by a fellow University of Essex computer science student, Roy Trubshaw. "Roy wrote the first version of MUD in 1978, to test the shared memory he was using. Then we wrote MUD 2 and MUD 3 together. Roy's forte was programming low level operations; he wasn't that interested in the game side, although he could do it if he had to. I was more into the game side, but I could program if I had to."

Originally, MUD was running on a 36 bit processor, which meant that 36 people could play it at once. While most of those who were playing were internal University users, it was also possible for people from outside to dial in and play. At first, this was via the university's link with the Arpanet (the network linking US universities and research establishments that was to evolve into the Internet). MUD then became so popular with a select group of people that they clubbed together and bought the University some extra phone lines and modems so that it would be easier to get on the system. Even so, people were ringing up at midnight in order to get the connection, although they weren't actually planning to start playing until 2am.

Effectively, Bartle took Trubshaw's program, which was at heart a computer conferencing system which allowed users to go off into different 'rooms' for private conversations, and turned it into an online game, creating much of the back story himself. And it was Bartle who saw the commercial possibilities for the game and sold an external investor on the idea, which led to the launch of MUD 1 (even though it was really MUD v3) on Compuserve in 1985, where the Americans renamed it British Legends "because they didn't think people would play a game called dirt, and to excuse the British spellings".

Unfortunately, it's at that point that the whole comedy of errors which was to dog the history of MUD for the next decade or so began (and which is probably why you've never heard of Richard Bartle). Bartle, Trubshaw and the external investor, Simon Dally, a successful publisher who had been behind the launch of The Hacker's Handbook, one of the seminal popular computing books of the '80s, formed a company, Multi User Entertainment (MUSE), to exploit MUD, with Dally having the controlling stake.

Dally, a manic depressive, then killed himself after stealing £800,000 of rare books and emptying the company bank account. He had written a codicil to his will leaving his controlling stake in MUSE to Bartle and Trubshaw, but his brother managed to get the codicil broken and Bartle and Trubshaw had to borrow money from the bank to buy him out.

Quote

MUD holds the record for being the longest running online game ever – not bad for a text-based adventure game

Unquote

MUSE then signed a deal with British Telecom for MUD 2; but BT was in the run-up to privatisation, and was changing its structure every few months. And every time the corporate structure changed, MUSE found itself dealing with a different person, and one further down the food chain. The original contract with BT was signed with a BT board director: a few years later, when the two companies agreed to part company, the legal documents to dissolve the relationship were signed off for BT by someone on a six month Youth Opportunity Programme.

BT also never managed to market MUD 2 successfully, and effectively barred MUSE from marketing it itself or from licensing the game to any other online service providers. As Bartle says: "We weren't allowed to market the game – they were supposed to. But they didn't, because it wasn't making enough money. Which was because they weren't marketing it."

▶▶

The ban on licensing MUD 2 to other companies originally included Prestel, the very popular Teletext-based information service which was actually owned by BT itself. Eventually, a version of MUD 2 was developed by someone else for Prestel and launched as Shades, a game which proved extremely popular – but which brought MUSE no money.

Once the BT relationship ended, MUSE signed up with Interplay, where MUD 2 was meant to form one of the keystones for the US company's online games division. But Interplay demanded the sole rights to run MUD 2 around the world, forced MUSE to cancel a number of potential contracts, and then never signed the contract. MUSE had been close to getting MUD 2 onto America Online, but the problems with Interplay scuppered that.

CHANGING ROLES

The relationship with Interplay wasn't helped by the fact that the head of the online games division had been somewhat distracted by the fact that he had decided that he was a she, and was undergoing a sex change. Bartle observes: "He – or she – was a very honourable person, and had been great to work with. She's now a well-respected Internet guru." He/she and his/her deputy (who had been his wife) quit in disgust over their bosses' attitude.

There's far more to the trials and tribulations of MUSE than that, and the full story can be found on the MUSE web site, www.mud.co.uk. But as you can imagine, all of this was hugely frustrating for Richard Bartle, who had seen the whole Internet revolution coming since the late '70s, and who believed – with considerable justification – that he had, in MUD, the perfect game to take advantage of it.

But then things took a turn for the better, and MUSE linked up with BT Wireplay, the online games division of BT – but a very different BT to the one Bartle had had so many problems with in the '80s. For a start, he says wryly, "it wasn't run by suits". BT Wireplay hosted MUD 2, and "we got a whole load of people playing a text based game who would never have done so before".

Wireplay then got together with a number of other companies to become Gameplay.com, where Bartle is now head of games design. Although Gameplay.com makes its money from selling games, it knows that it has to have a site which people really want to visit, so it hosts a number of online games. But the company is aware that many software companies are signing exclusive deals for online versions of their products with service providers, while others are looking at developing their own online retail sites, so it has begun to work on its own online games, both multiplayer and against the computer. Bartle says: "We're aware that there is a potential impact if games publishers start signing exclusivity deals with people like AOL or Amazon. Also, people may start setting up their own game servers, dedicated to their products. That could throw the whole community dynamic of Gameplay.com out of kilter, so we need our own games. My job is to design them and get my team to program them. As to the sort of games which we might be seeing from Gameplay.com, Bartle is a little more circumspect. "There will certainly be role playing games, there will certainly be strategy games and some will be of a type we haven't seen before," he admits. "But we also have to be aware of just who buys games from us – and our customers aren't always game players. A lot of them are mothers buying for their kids."

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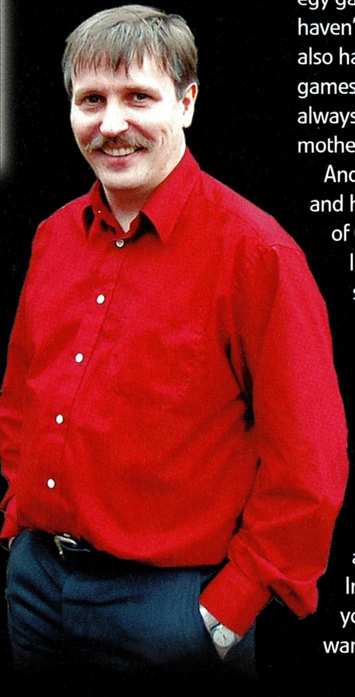

And there is also the matter of when and how people play games online: a lot of Gameplay.com's traffic comes at lunchtime, so there will have to be short games which can be completed in half an hour or an hour. Furthermore, "like a lot of people, we are working on developing WAP [Wireless Application Protocol] games for mobile phones and other devices. And we also have our own digital television studio. Basically, we'll develop games for anything that's connected to the Internet. If you can play a game on your smoke detector at home, we want to design it." PCSG.

What does Richard Bartle play?

"I've currently got two games of Civ 2 going, one on each PC so that when I'm working on one, I can be playing on the other. I play it at deity level, and I've completed about 100 games. I've got Civ 2: Test of Time – little did I realise it would be a test of my time, until I turned the graphics off."

94
<<<
>>>
Continue Game
Wolves Tactics
Bolton Tactics
Commentary Speed
Wolves 2
Bolton 1
Match Overview
Match Stats
Action Zones
Match Report
Wolves Stats
Player Ratings
Latest Scores
Bolton Stats
Molineux, Wolverhampton

```
        Stowell found Gomez Colomer with a low forward pass
        Gomez Colomer came forward
        Gomez Colomer sent the ball into the area for Keane
        Diving header from Keane
        Keane scored !!
54 min  Sellars looked for Hansen in front of him
        Hansen looked for Holdsworth in front of him
        Block tackle from Muscat, easily dispossessing Holdsworth
        Ferguson took control of the loose ball
        From long range, Ferguson bent the ball towards goal
        But Ferguson put it well wide
59 min  Bull rose above Jensen to win the ball
        Bull headed the ball out right to Keane
        Keane tried a volley
        Jaaskelainen gathered the ball safely
61 min  Short played the ball right to Elliott's feet
        Elliott looked to play it past Gomez Colomer
        Elliott turned Gomez Colomer
        Elliott chipped it forward to Holdsworth
        Emblen backed into and fouled Holdsworth
```

"I quite like Championship Manager – if only my portable would run it faster than it does. Those bastards at Leicester City sacked me for no reason – and I'd won the European Championships for them! About six months after that, they offered me the job back – and I turned them down..."

"There was one game I could never win, but I kept playing it for years. Every so often, I'd pull it off the shelf and have another go. It was called The Patrician, and it was all about trading between Hanseatic League cities in the 16th century. It cheated – for example, when I bid for a trading ship, the computer controlled merchants would bid against me so I'd have to pay 50,000 Thalers. But if I didn't bid, one of them would get it for 20,000. I finally found a way of cheating myself, using the pepper ships that arrived every so often. I loved that game – except for the cheating – and it took me six years to beat it. I finally managed it in November last year."

BARTLE ON ONLINE GAMES

"Massively multiplayer games are so different to any other sort of games that the first one you ever play is the one that has the most impact on you, and you'll stay loyal to that game for years, no matter how good or bad it is. So it doesn't matter how good an online game is, what will determine whether it succeeds or not is how many people you get playing it at the start. And that means you have to put enough money behind the marketing for the game to ensure that you get lots of people trying it.

"What starts people playing a new game is the advertising – what keeps them playing is the other players. And what stops them playing is the other players, too. It's a double edged sword, community."

"Multiplayer games don't have to be that good to be successful. There are games out there that are very good, but no-one knows about them. Most online service providers just don't understand online gaming and why people play."

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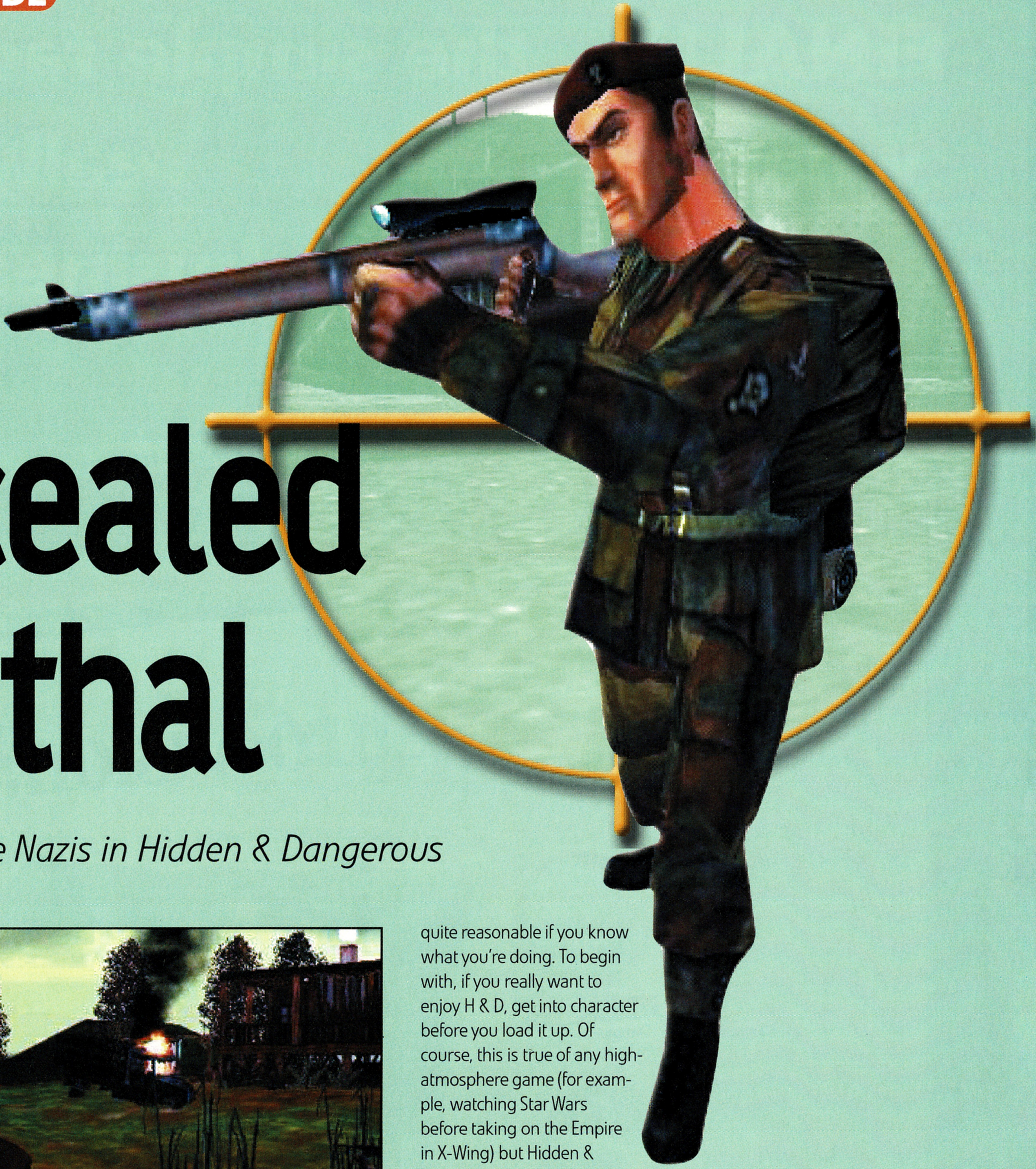


Concealed & Lethal

How to Slaughter the Nazis in Hidden & Dangerous

Above: An SAS operative unafraid of getting all muddy, yesterday

Take 2's **Hidden & Dangerous** is arguably the most realistic WWII tactical combat game available, but the original version was heavily bugged, and even when it's running properly it's monstrously hard to complete – so why bother?

Well, the bugs have largely been rectified by the latest patch (available on this month's PCSG cover CD) and gameplay is actually quite reasonable if you know what you're doing. To begin with, if you really want to enjoy H & D, get into character before you load it up. Of course, this is true of any high-atmosphere game (for example, watching Star Wars before taking on the Empire in X-Wing) but Hidden & Dangerous has Nazis as the villains – so a feeling of self-righteous indignation can legitimately be whipped-up.

Half-an-hour in front of Casablanca or a couple of chapters of Schindler's List reminds the player that killing SS men is (almost) a valid statement of humanity. Seriously though, if you approach Hidden & Dangerous as just another shoot-em-up, rather than a crafted historical recreation, you will miss much of the game's dark, '40s atmosphere.

Pre-campaign preparation is a major key to success. If you simply let the computer choose your eight-man team, for example, you'll end-up with a randomised mob of semi-employable nitwits. It may be a bore, but it's worth trawling through the stats in each dossier to pick out the specialists.

A mere five percentage points up or down can make a major impact in this game: the difference between, for example, a trooper's wound being fatal or just slowing his movement. Any stat below 50% should disqualify a candidate unless he is a real master in another ability, but most of all, never recruit a man with less that 70% in the Shoot skill. Often a whole scenario will turn on a soldier hitting his targets in a three-second firefight, so a Shoot accuracy of 70% or less is just too much of a liability.

There are four specialities you look to fill. Take two men in each category on campaign, but always use the better man for missions. Your blokes don't improve with experience, so you don't need to worry about building-up your B-team, but you will need back-up men for when the Germans inevitably get lucky.

SELECT SNIPERS

The most important speciality are the snipers – men with Shoot percentages of 90 or more, and Reactions over 75%. These will kill high vantage-point sentries and, if handled by the player personally, can take-out a whole patrol before the Jerrys can so much as cock their rifles – allow me to recommend Prvt. John Stirling and Prvt. Bill 'Spider' Web.

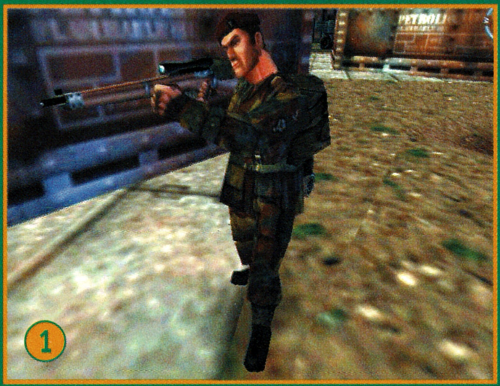
Next in importance are the heavy machine gun boys – these need Strength percentages over 80 (to lug the thing about quickly) but can get away with Shoot skills of 75%, due to the weapon's scatter effect. These will act as the pivot of your team; once the sniper has cleared the immobile sentries they can set-up in cover and slaughter passing patrols. Sgt. Jiri 'Butcher' Trebissky and Lt. (Sir) Thomas Woolley are fine chaps in this capacity.

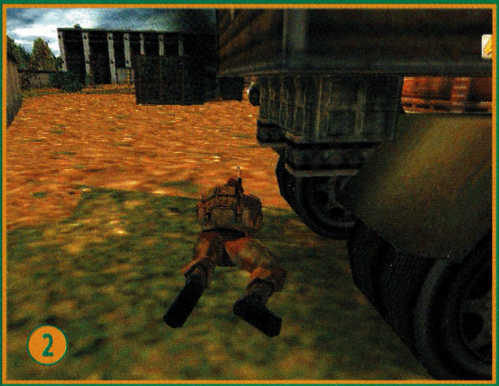
Then you will need recon/assassins. These will naturally need high Stealth abilities (80% and up) and a similar ability in Reactions (for when stealth fails and that SS sentry starts to aim his rifle). These guys come into their own when you need to find where the Germans have hidden their sentries. Also, if you spot a lone trooper, take control of the recon man, sneak-up behind the victim and finish them silently with a bayonet: you will suffer molar crunching tension, but it's darkly satisfying when you pull it off. In the espionage-type missions, you should usually assign your chief spook the task on his own; the rest of the team will only act as extra targets and are likely to set off the alarm with their army-booted bashing-about. Lt. Tony 'Eye' Switcher and Prvt. Jan Wolchowski are fine throat-slitters.

Lastly, you'll want to recruit a couple of all-round dogsbodies who do most of their killing with small, short-range sten guns but, as a result, will have plenty of backpack room to do the bazooka, demolition and landmine work as well. As the demoli-

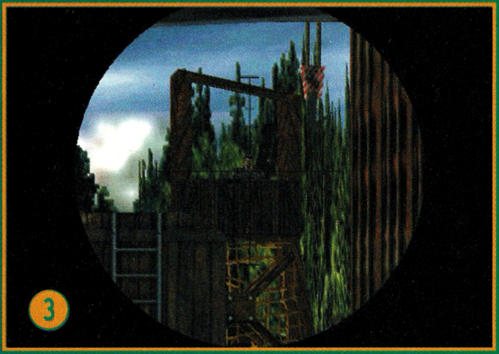
▶▶

Hidden & Dangerous Sniping sequence

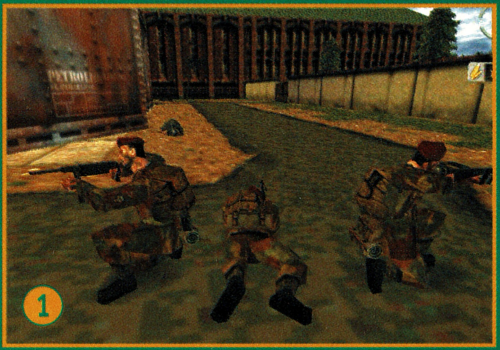




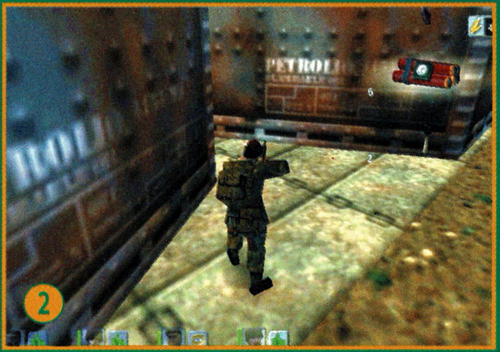
Successful sniping is all about correct posture. The soldier in PICTURE 1 is about to die because he is standing-up: everybody, including Hitler 300 miles away in Berlin, can see him. The sniper in PICTURE 2 is a sensible chap and will live to read this magazine 55 years after V.E. day. He is using local cover and is, most importantly, crawling on his tummy. The Germans are unlikely to spot him. Get it right and you will be rewarded by the view seen in PICTURE 3. You will note that the German is also standing-up and is also about to die.

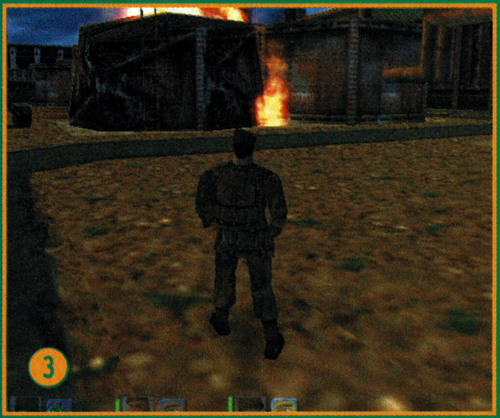


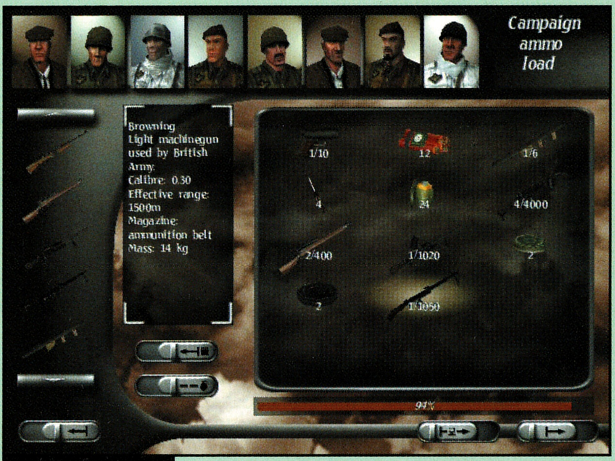
Hidden & Dangerous Explosion sequence



Not everything in Hidden & Dangerous demands brutal combat: your men can also pause to enjoy the subtle things of life, like big explosions. First clear the area of annoying German safety inspectors – sorry – guards (PICTURE 1). Then find a suitably unstable object (like these petrol tanks in PICTURE 2) and attach a bit of dynamite. Give yourself enough fuse to get to a safe distance and enjoy the show (PICTURE 3).







Browning
Light machinegun
used by British
Army.
Calibre: 0.30
Effective range:
1500m
Magazine:
ammunition belt
Mass: 14 kg

Above: **The PCSG A-Team (and their favourite guns)**

tion engineers/rush-goalies on the team, these characters need Shoot, Reaction, Strength and Endurance skills all over 70%. When there is nothing to blow-up in a mission, use these guys as back up to the snipers and heavy machinegunners, and as cover for the recon men in case they have to come back in a hurry. Mjr 'Mad' Bill Calvert and Prvt. Paul 'Pilot' McGatt are good solid back-up men.

Quote

If you send your blokes steaming in as if they were playing Doom, they'll be dead before you can say 'bodybag'

Unquote

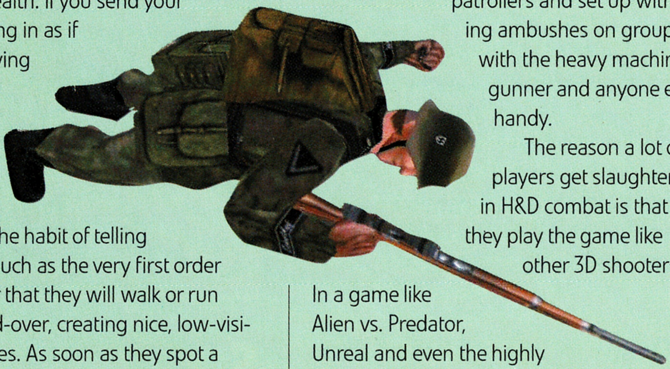
So you've got your team – now you need to equip them. Of course, you could hit the auto-setup button. This will not only save lots of clicking, but will also put in enough vital equipment components to finish the campaign; there's nothing as mortifying as killing dozens of people, only to find you haven't packed enough dynamite to blow-up all the gas tanks...

SELECT YOUR ARSENAL WELL

But while useful in this way, the auto-setup will also fill your inventory with useless junk like binoculars, cameras and the utterly pointless handguns. Also, don't be tempted to take eight of everything, as the game only lets you take four men on any one mission. Two sniper's rifles and two heavy machineguns will do for the specialists, with four sten guns and bayonets as the basic tools for the whole team.

One bazooka, a score of English grenades, a flare gun and a couple of anti-personnel mines will usually be all you need to take on top of this – depending on your style of play. Having thus spring-cleaned your inventory, you should have a fair amount of space left for the most vital type of equipment: bullets. Your blokes can run through ammo at a rate of knots, so carry as much as possible.

OK, your blokes are armed to the teeth and look like Force 10 from Navarone, but they are all dead five minutes after you start the first mission... What's going on? Each level has widely varying demands, but there are a few basics you should always stick to if you want to live to see VE Day. The first and foremost is stealth. If you send your blokes steaming in as if they were playing Doom, they'll all be dead before you can say body bag. Get into the habit of telling them all to crouch as the very first order you give. After that they will walk or run about doubled-over, creating nice, low-visibility silhouettes. As soon as they spot a German, order them to crawl. All this will slow them up, but not as much as being shot.



Above: **Emergency exits are located to the side and rear of the aircraft**

You should get used to going to the strategic overview every few seconds while your men are on the move. For a start, this pauses the game and gives you a little respite from the tension. Secondly, your men often spot Germans long before the shooting starts, but they never actually tell you. The Germans show-up on the strategic map as red circles, so check for these just before your men crest a ridge or otherwise emerge from cover.

Move your men forward in increments – recon man first, sniper and heavy machine gun man in the middle and the all-rounder bringing-up the rear. When anyone spots a German, have a look through their eyes to decide if the enemy is a stationary sentry, a lone patroller or part of a group. When you've made-up your mind, watch a bit longer. Even stationary sentries can be passed by patrols, and it's invariably better to kill them when their demise will be unobserved. Use your sniper on sentries and lone patrollers and set up withering ambushes on groups with the heavy machinegunner and anyone else handy.

The reason a lot of players get slaughtered in H&D combat is that they play the game like other 3D shooters. In a game like Alien vs. Predator, Unreal and even the highly realistic Swat 3, you will normally do most of your fighting close to the enemy – close enough to catch their last breath, so-to-speak. In Hidden & Dangerous you must always spot the enemy before they spot you, and preferably kill them before they can get off a shot. Always use snipers to hit the enemy from a distance, if at all possible – the victim's compatriots will go on-guard the moment he drops dead, but they generally don't move out of the danger area or even duck. If you put your sniper in good cover, he can pick-off these fools in his own time at minimum risk.

The next best option is the heavy machinegunner set-up in an ambush situation. When ambushing, speed is of the essence: cut the enemy down and then get back into deep cover, or the next patrol will catch you.

Good heavy machinegun ambush points

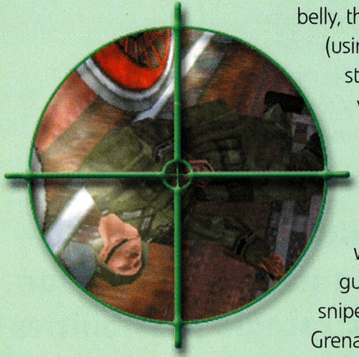
Above: The sniper is too pre-occupied to notice that his knees have frozen to the ground

are facing corners which patrols regularly round and doors from which reinforcements will run when the alarm is sounded. Sooner-or-later, you will have to fall back on fighting with sub-machineguns in hot situations.

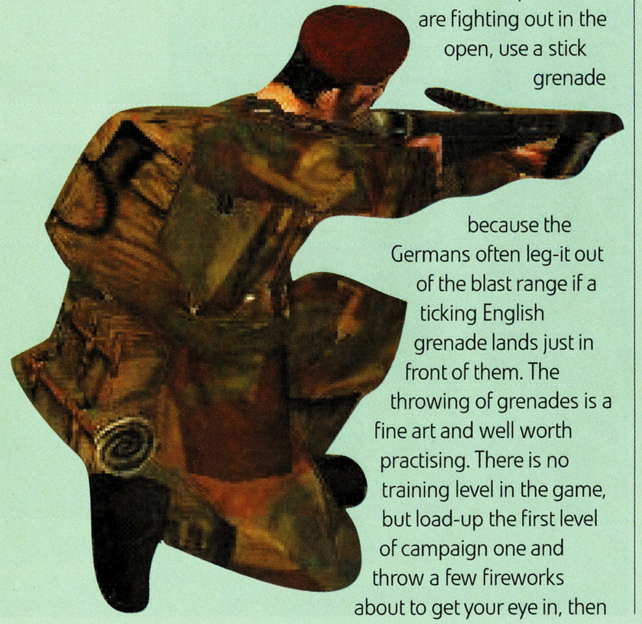
KEEP ON MOVING

Remember that sub-machineguns are still quite accurate over medium-long ranges, so still keep your distance if at all possible. Move about (as much as your own aiming will allow) to spoil the enemy's aim. Fire in short, controlled bursts and conserve ammunition, but if desperate, empty the whole clip in the right general direction and hope.

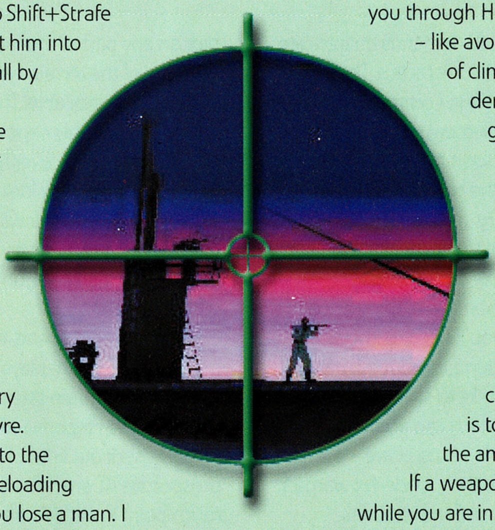
A useful trick to deal with stationary groups of sentries is to lie your man on his belly, then roll him horizontally (using the shift + the left/right strafe key) out of cover, into view of the Germans. Keep rolling and start firing. You won't find it much harder to aim, but the Jerrys will miss a lot. (This trick works well with heavy and sub machine-guns, but don't try it with the sniper's rifle.)



Grenades are fine in their place, but definitely should be saved for special situations – not least because they will alert all the nearby patrols, who will come running. Toss English grenades through open doorways (provided you are sure that there are no plot-needed civilians in the room with the Germans). Otherwise always throw German stick grenades and dive (or roll) for cover. This is because German grenades are not delayed detonation, like the English grenades, but explode on impact. Use English grenades whenever you need to time to get out of the blast radius. If, on the other hand, your men are fighting out in the open, use a stick grenade because the Germans often leg-it out of the blast range if a ticking English grenade lands just in front of them. The throwing of grenades is a fine art and well worth practising. There is no training level in the game, but load-up the first level of campaign one and throw a few fireworks about to get your eye in, then restart the level. A high throw percentage (above 50%) will create a high throw-arc and will send the grenade a long way. This is obviously fine, unless you are trying to get the damn thing through a doorway. To prevent embarrassing, and generally fatal, lintel-bounce situations, lie your man on his belly and throw between 20-40%. Obviously, this will leave your man very close to the explosion point, so Shift+Strafe roll hurriedly to get him into the cover of the wall by the door.



Finally, there are the bayonets. Only use these when you are sure you will have time to crawl up, unobserved behind a lone guard. And always save the game before you try this risky manoeuvre.



This brings me to the touchy subject of reloading the game when you lose a man. I know that to some players this is anathema, but you will seriously need to consider it if you lose too many key team members on a mission. You can refresh your team members between campaigns, but the replacements will be dangerously underskilled, and get worse as more are called-up. The latter campaigns are very hard, and demand skilled fighters...

Once you are fairly sure that all is quiet again after a firefight, set-up sentries to give covering fire and send a man out to loot the corpses – most especially if they were carrying sub machineguns. When you start running short of sten gun ammo later in the campaign you'll be glad you nicked these. Also grab any German stick grenades if backpack space allows.

There are several other useful tips to get you through Hidden & Dangerous – like avoiding the necessity of climbing down ladders (because the programming here is distinctly dodgy and will let them fall to their deaths) and avoiding water at all costs as none of your tough SAS men can swim. Another is to keep an eye on the ammunition counter. If a weapon is low on bullets while you are in cover, reload. Still, the real key to winning the game is in the overhead strategic view. Experiment, learn to give your men the right orders for each situation and always end by telling them to either guard in a specified direction or to hold fire. Their AI is generally very good, but unless told not to, they will fire on Germans automatically and will then start moving around and get themselves shot.

Be conservative when entrusting actions to the AI (never expecting the men to get too much done in one go) and perform any daring or tricky stuff personally. After all, you are the hero of this story, aren't you?

Close Combat IV

Get a grip on yourself and pick up that rifle, soldier, says Drill Sergeant ***Barry Ryan***

Close Combat IV demands an intricate grasp of small unit tactics. This is definitely not RTS à la Command & Conquer. Try to implement rushing-type assaults and you'll soon be sending your men home, not in the customary box or bodybag, but in very small envelope-sized packages. If you are to prosper, or even survive, in the crucible of battle that is the Ardennes in December 1944, there are a number of things you'll need to know.

At PCSG, we've found this out the hard way and we would like to save you the time, tears and trouble which can accompany the game's fairly steep learning curve – particularly if you're new to the wonderful wargaming world of the Close Combat series.

THE DEPLOYMENT PHASE

This is the most important phase in each battle. It's here that you can ensure, in true Zen fashion, that the battle is won before it's fought or at the very least not lost before it's begun – if you see what I mean. Most great military leaders have demonstrated a natural ability for assessing the strategic possibilities afforded by topography and terrain. You too are going to have to become proficient in sizing up the geography of the various battlefields in order to wring the optimum advantage from your unit placements. Right click on any part of the map and you'll get a synopsis of the terrain type, elevation and level of cover available. That ploughed field may look incredibly exposed but, in fact, it provides excellent cover for a prone infantry unit. That house may look very sturdy and stable, but a right click will reveal that it provides only average cover, allowing mortar rounds and machine gun fire to wreak havoc with your units.

The placement of anti-tank units is crucial, particularly if you're playing with the Americans, as often these units offer the only effective response to German armour. Always check out lines of sight from each prospective AT emplacement. There's not much point in sticking an AT piece in the middle of a forest where visibility runs to about five inches in front of the barrel, unless of course this is a deliberate surprise tactic.

The best place you can position an AT gun is in a building. Try and locate one which offers a decent level of protection and provides a relatively wide field of fire. Unfortunately your medium AT guns will have to remain at the mercy of the elements as they're far too unwieldy to move indoors. When positioning AT units you must remember that once you've placed them, that's it, they're not going anywhere for the remainder of the encounter. Your crews can attempt to drag them about the place, but this should really only be undertaken in desperate, last ditch circumstances. Positioning infantry is another matter. You need to weigh up the options and tactical necessities. Are you fighting a defensive action, seeking to deny the enemy territory while maximising his casualties or do you need to push him off the map? In defensive scenarios, place your men in houses, shell craters, trenches and forested areas. Make it difficult for the enemy to find out where you are. Use hit and run tactics. Take out a half-track with a bazooka team and rapidly change position. Use a rifle team to shoot up a German infantry unit and have them decamp to a safer location. Above all, make your opponent come to you. In defensive encounters the onus rests on the attacker. He must take victory locations, which means, to a certain extent, you know where he must attack. Cover these locations effectively and you're bound to give the enemy a bloody nose. Also remember that victory locations can act as a magnet for enemy fire. You don't have to be in them, or indeed on them, to defend them effectively. If you need to go on the offensive, it's best that you adopt a conservative approach during the deployment phase.

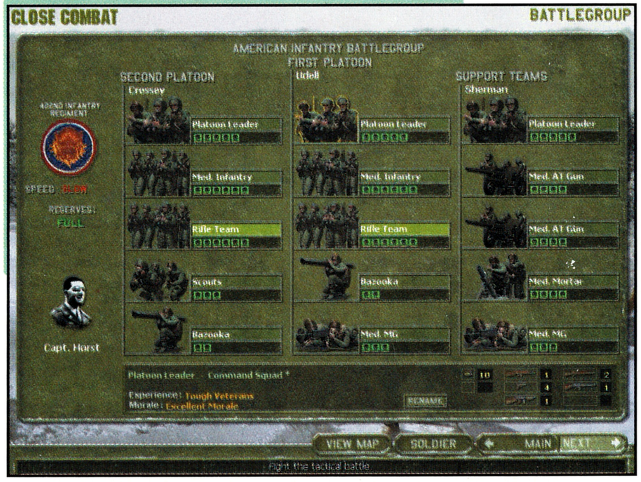
Quote

> **Most great military leaders have demonstrated a natural ability for assessing the strategic possibilities afforded by topography and terrain**

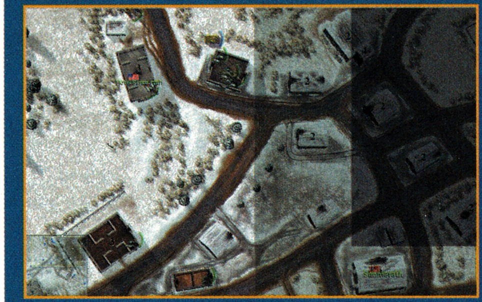
Unquote

Position your units behind buildings and

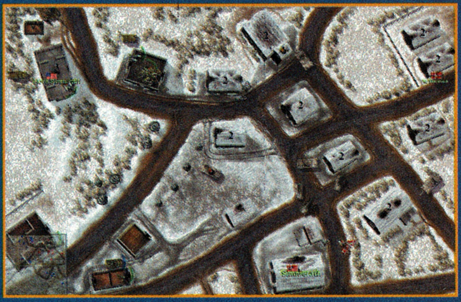
Below: This is a fairly standard Americam Platoon. No armour, but use those AT guns and Bazooka teams well enough and you shouldn't need any



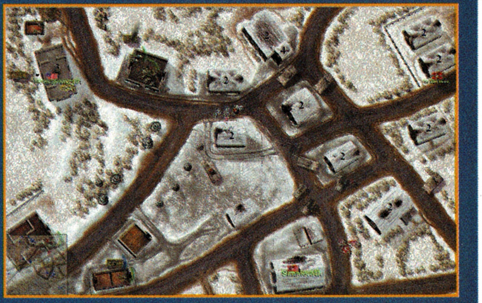
Close Combat IV – how to take out Panthers in six easy lessons



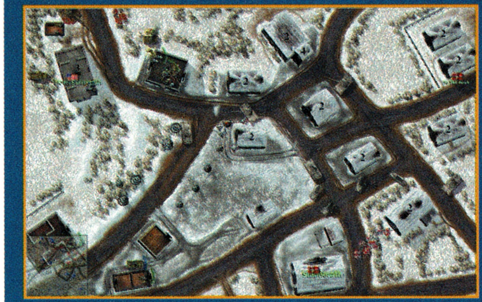
STEP 1 Both AT guns are carefully deployed in excellent concealed positions. They can command the town's road network and are well supported by infantry and a light tank



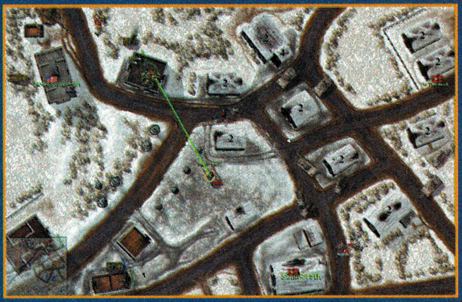
STEP 2 Let the games begin. Immediately the Medium AT gun (top,dug in) takes out a rocket half track and will shortly dispatch an AT half track. The Panther is a worry, though



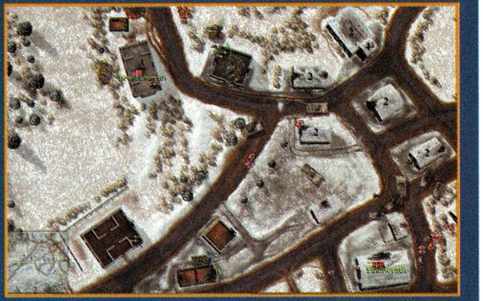
STEP 3 Oh dear, the Panther in the town centre (targeted) has taken out the medium AT gun, but is about to receive a hammering from the concealed light AT. You hope



STEP 4 The Stuart Light Tank which was covering the AT guns has met with a sticky end. You can blame the Panther lurking beside the bell tower



STEP 5 The light AT gun hidden in the building frantically targets an oncoming Panther. Target reticle is yellow, indicating a fair chance of success



STEP 6 Boom, job done. Well done, those light AT gunners. Taking out a Panther's got to be worth a medal of some sort, surely. Now for the other two...

out of harm's way. Place your scouts forward so that you can use them to recce the area and, if necessary, draw fire from concealed enemy positions. Take a close look at your deployment area and try to do the unexpected. Hiding armour behind buildings and in woods maximises one of the greatest advantages you've got when attacking – the defender doesn't know the size, composition or strength of the force facing him. Keep him off balance and you're half way to victory.

INFANTRY TACTICS

The infantry should provide the grist to your mill – more often they end up as meat for the grinder. Here are a couple of tips which should save your blushes and lower the bodycount.

American Infantry units are less well equipped than their German counterparts and in a stand up fight they generally come off worse. The German infantry units, particularly their heavy infantry, constitute the most potent infantry units on the field. The only American units which come close are the combat engineers, and they are few and far between. Consequently, American infantry need to be carefully placed and manoeuvred during battle.

As a general rule, all infantry units should be placed on an 'ambush' footing from the outset, as you don't want them giving away their positions needlessly. Try to ensure that any cluster of infantry can use covering fire from medium or heavy machine gun units. If possible, have a bazooka team on hand to counter any armoured threat. Any hidden infantry unit on ambush can devastate assaulting infantry and even score the occasional victory against enemy armour – very satisfying! Shell craters and trenches also provide excellent cover for infantry units and should be considered carefully during the deployment phase.

Moving your infantry safely around the battlefield is a practised art, and one which you should take great pains to cultivate. There are three movement settings; sneak, move and move fast. Sneak should be your default movement mode at all times. On this setting your infantry units will edge forward on their bellies, cutting down their visibility and exposure to enemy fire. The 'move' mode sees them move forward in an orderly fashion. This mode will also allow your unit to fire on the move with relative accuracy.

Fast movement should only be resorted to when you have a pressing and unavoidable need to move a unit quickly from one place to the next. When an infantry unit is moving fast they will focus only on their destination, and can become strung out and separated. They are also extremely susceptible to ambush attacks and get into trouble faster than they can get out. Moving infantry units in isolation on any mode is not recommended. It's best to ensure that there are units nearby to provide covering fire. Generally, it's a good idea to attach a medium machine gun team to an infantry unit, and move them in tandem.

THE INFANTRY ASSAULT

Assaulting an objective is not simply a case of selecting a unit and sending them in. ▶▶

Above: US jeep flees German onslaught

Obviously you can take this approach, but nine times out of 10, you'll pay dearly for adopting such a lazy tactic. As with so much in Close Combat, advance planning and preparation is the key. So you need to assault a building. Start by pouring suppressing fire into the objective to soften it up. If it's of crucial strategic value you may decide the building merits the attention of your mortar.

Examine the target before committing a morter to it. If you've got a light mortar and the target offers anything from average cover upwards, your mortar rounds are going to be little more than a nuisance to the defenders. However, medium mortars can be devastating when used in this context. Once you've prepped the assault objective, you're ready to launch the attack.

SMOKIN'

Do not attempt to send in the infantry until you've laid some smoke. Smoke is one of the most important defensive/offensive options available to you. Each infantry unit can deploy smoke, as can mortars. Obviously, laying smoke confuses and obfuscates defenders but it can also lessen the efficacy of your covering fire. Which brings us neatly onto the next topic. Keep pouring covering fire into the target until the last possible minute. Do, however try to avoid mowing down your own assault troops with your well-intentioned cover fire. When a unit's assaulting you've got two options. You can move them fast, ensuring they cover dead ground, but they'll lack cohesiveness and may arrive piecemeal at the objective.

Alternatively you can select the 'move' mode which will have them moving more tentatively but in better order, while providing some of their own covering fire. I'd plump for the latter option every time. Follow these simple steps and your assault plans should come to fruition nicely. Remember that once you've taken a location you'll need to consolidate quickly in preparation for the inevitable counter-attack. Get supporting units in place quickly.

Armour is a crucial ingredient in the Close Combat IV melting pot – whether you've got any or not. If you opt to command the Yanks, you'll find yourself without armour support for much of the time. And when you do get some you'll notice the vast disparity in quality between German armour and your own.

As a general rule German armour is tougher, better crewed and more lethal than the American line-up. The golden rule when manoeuvring armour is support, support, support. Armour should not be allowed to rove around the battle map without supporting infantry units. This is particularly the case in urban areas and densely forested sectors. Infantry and AT guns can be easily concealed in these locations, and unleashed when your armour comes within spitting distance. Watching your once proud armoured spearhead disintegrate is one of the most humbling and chastening experiences afforded by Close Combat IV.

Use your infantry units, particularly any scouts you may have, to recce the area, locate enemy strongpoints and generally draw fire. That is, after all, their primary function. This should see you neatly avoiding any potential bear traps. Any sensible opponent will be loathe to reveal the location of his AT guns until they can be used to take out a large juicy armoured target. You may wish to draw fire with a target of lesser value, such as a half track or armoured car. Nine times out of 10 the target will prove irresistible. You'll sacrifice an armoured car, but hopefully he'll betray his position and allow you to snuff out the anti-tank threat with minimum losses.

Dealing with enemy armour presents a different challenge. Essentially, it's a battle of wits. Unless your opponent is foolish enough to present his armour on a plate, you can bet that they'll be waiting to pounce from behind buildings, in woods or on rises. Again, this is where sound reconnaissance comes into play. An infantry unit going forward may catch a glimpse of an armoured unit. You can then martial your own units to deal with the threat. Try to get in position for a rear or side attack which will maximise your chance of success. If you're an American commande,r you'll often find yourself dealing with armoured units which can only be eliminated from the side or rear due to a combination of their superb armour and your paucity of decent tanks. When moving forward, always aim to present the tank's front to any area of perceived threat. This is where the armour is thickest and where a direct hit will have less chance of success. Also examine the type of opponent you're dealing with. If it's a self-propelled gun or tank killer, it'll have no turret, and the whole chassis will need to be turned to change aim. Take on one of these with a conventional turreted armour unit and you should easily get the drop on him. Obviously you're also going to have to exercise a certain amount of common sense. Sending a light tank up against a Tiger or Jagdpanther is tantamount to suicide and, if you indulge in this sort of behaviour you deserve some big bore justice at their unlovely hands.

AIRSTRIKES AND ARTILLERY BARRAGES

The ability to call in off-screen artillery barrages and summon airstrikes was one of the most eagerly anticipated features of CCIV. Unfortunately, in actual game play terms they don't exert much of an impact. Barrages can be used to sow confusion in the enemy ranks, but generally they're woefully inaccurate and inflict little or no damage to armour.

Don't squander your artillery on isolated units; wait until you can dial in a barrage on an enemy concentration. Also, if you can avoid the temptation to use artillery each time it's made available, you'll find that they'll accumulate. The use of airstrikes is fairly cosmetic as they tend to inflict little damage on targeted units. The key to managing airstrikes is to pay attention to the type of plane on offer. Asking a P-51 Mustang to take out a Panther is like asking Posh Spice to put Giant Haystacks on his back. A B-26, however, might just do the job. Hold off on deploying airstrikes until you really need to. Use them as a last ditch, get out of jail free card. Is that Panther about to roll over your medium infantry? Send for the Angels on their shoulders fast! PCSG.

CLOSE COMBAT IV
BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Championship Manager 3

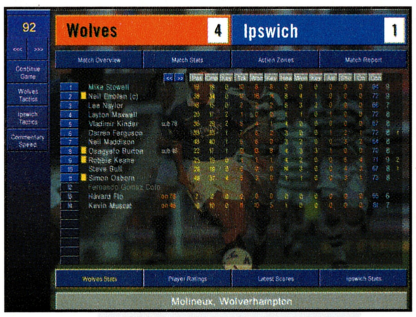
__Mark Shaw__ smokes a fat cigar, sips his champagne and explains how to avoid getting football pie all over your face

A lot of the groundwork for a good team needs to be laid before the season begins. Prior to taking charge of any team, check the players AND the staff to see if they fit (or can be made to fit) your preferred style of play. Hiring good staff at the early stages of the games – a scout, a physiotherapist and an assistant manager at least – provides a good foundation for long-term success. Think seriously before signing any new players or staff and ensure that players placed on your shortlist will fit well in the position and team formation which you envisage for them.

Certain characteristics are more important according to position, for example, strikers need good shooting and anticipation; attacking midfielders need pace, dribbling, creativity and teamwork; midfielders/defensive midfielders need teamwork, stamina and tackling; while defenders/sweepers should have good tackling, bravery, strength and marking. Passing is intrinsic throughout.

A central spine is vital – without a strong keeper, central defender, central midfielder and striker, your team will struggle to carve out results. Purchase (if necessary) and keep the same good players in these positions and keep them happy. Remember, however, that having too many players in your squad will mean a hefty wage bill and more problems keeping players happy, so keep you squad to a reasonable number. Anything more than 22 is excessive and will probably lead to some excluded players becoming disgruntled.

Look to buy young players with potential and don't worry about playing them too soon – as the old adage goes, 'if they're good enough, they're old enough'.



1 Mike Stowell
2 Neil Emblen (c)
3 Lee Naylor
4 Layton Maxwell
5 Vladimir Kinder sub 78
6 Darren Ferguson
7 Neil Maddison
8 Osagyefo Burton sub 46
9 Robbie Keane
10 Steve Bull
11 Simon Osborn
Fernando Gomez Colo
Havard Flo on 78
Kevin Muscat on 46

Molineux, Wolverhampton

Above: **Be as meticulous as you can in the search for new players – 11 Nicky Butts do not a great team make**

Only at the very highest levels will inexperience make a difference. To improve both their experience and their statistics, if needed, loan these younger players out to teams in lower divisions. By the time a player reaches the age of 24, his stats should remain fairly constant.

Don't change your starting line-up too often or too radically. Continuity is a key factor in creating balanced teams and keeping players happy. Likewise, don't re-organise your tactics too significantly during a match, as this tends to have the opposite effect to the one intended. If players cannot play due to injury, suspension or international duty, you may find yourself with empty berths and insufficient numbers. To combat this, plan two or three different formations and adjust your team's style of play when necessary rather than raiding the market for new players. A 4-4-2 formation is sufficient in most leagues and is practically a necessity in the lower divisions – at this level, players often lack the skills to play in other formations. Look to introducing a passing game as you reach the higher divisions.

ALL IN THE MIND

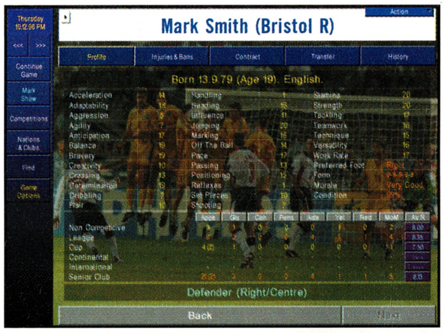
Check the status of your players – first-team players will not react kindly to being stuck on the bench or, worse, out of the team altogether – and monitor their morale. Think carefully before starting anyone with low or very low morale – you could instead introduce them as late substitutes to build up their confidence. Always check the opposition's tactics before starting a match or if the monitor bar suggests that their tactics are changing, and adapt your tactics accordingly. While you must play to your strengths, playing the same way week in week out will make you predictable and susceptible to tactical outmanoeuvring.

If faced with an overwhelmingly strong striker, shackle him by man-marking with two defenders. Except in the most dire or bizarre of circumstances, try not to use players out of position, unless their stats suggest that they can perform well there for you. The weather and the referee also play a part in how the game pans out – play long balls if weather is wet and windy and go easy on the tackling if the ref is a card-happy stickler for the rules.

Keep an eye on the fitness of your players. If any drop below 70% think about subbing as their contribution is more likely to hinder than help, and below 60% they risk a serious injury. There are many hidden statistics (such as consistency, vision, finishing and penalty-taking) that can be gleaned and therefore exploited by careful monitoring of your team's performance.

Players recovering from injury should be given a couple of games in the reserve team before turning out for the seniors to give them a chance to increase their fitness, morale and game readiness.

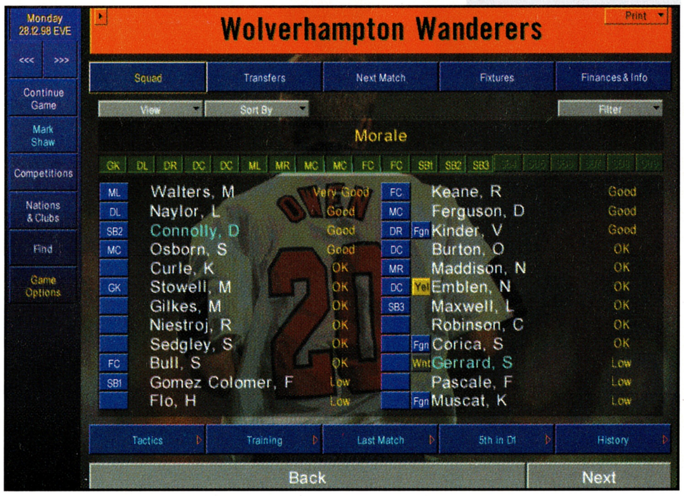
Although time is a luxury, patience is the key to long-term success. A team must be moulded over time – one player rarely solves all problems your team may be facing. Panic buys or massive tactical or team changes after matches may be extremely detrimental and extended losing runs means something radical may be necessary to stop the rot. Success breeds success, so try to start winning early and keep winning; but remember – it's a marathon, not a sprint. PCSG.



Mark Smith (Bristol R)

Born 13.9.79 (Age 19). English.

Defender (Right/Centre)



Wolverhampton Wanderers

Morale

ML	Walters, M	Very Good	FC		Keane, R	Good
DL	Naylor, L	Good	MC		Ferguson, D	Good
SB2	Connolly, D	Good	DR	Fgn	Kinder, V	Good
MC	Osborn, S	Good	DC		Burton, O	OK
	Curle, K	OK	MR		Maddison, N	OK
GK	Stowell, M	OK	DC	Yel	Emblen, N	OK
	Gilkes, M	OK	SB3		Maxwell, L	OK
	Niestroj, R	OK			Robinson, C	OK
	Sedgley, S	OK		Fgn	Corica, S	OK
FC	Bull, S	OK		Wnt	Gerrard, S	Low
SB1	Gomez Colomer, F	Low			Pascale, F	Low
	Flo, H	Low		Fgn	Muscat, K	Low

Left: **The game's hidden stats can be guessed at in the post-match analysis screens**
Below: **Unhappy players could be in danger of delivering sub-standard performances**

The blue, the gray and the PC

*In a gaming world awash with American Civil War titles, **Barry Ryan** sorts the men from the boys*

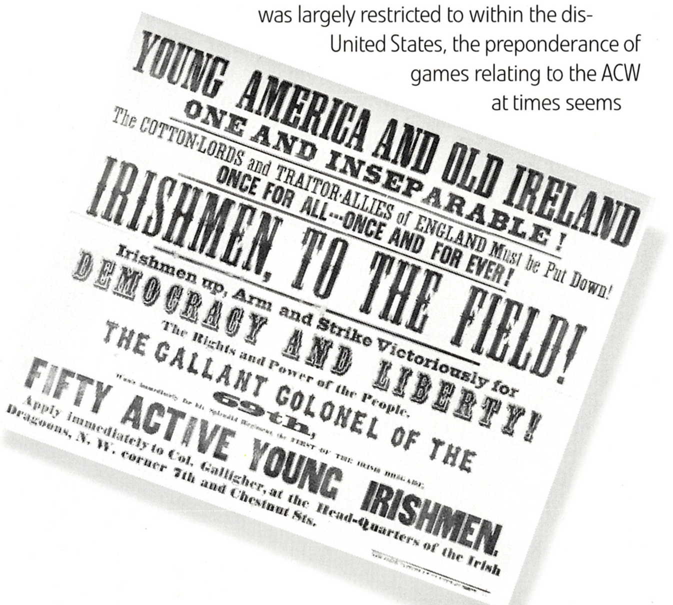
The American Civil war seems to hold an ungodly fascination for computer games developers. Go online and take a look at any listing of computer wargames, and chances are it'll be dominated by American Civil War titles.

To a large extent, it's understandable. Publishers are assuming that there will be a sizeable market for ACW games, because the USA is still the world's biggest market for computer games and the American Civil War is burned into the American psyche.

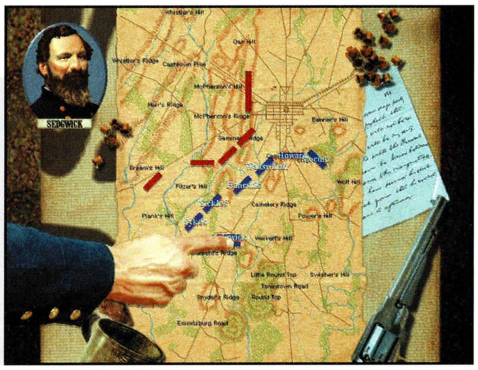
It's certainly true that in the wargames industry, ACW-related products are big business. Few publishers of board wargames will fail to have at least one ACW title in their portfolios, while there are dozens of plastic and metal figure ranges, not to mention rules sets, for table-top gamers.

Books on the American Civil War sell extremely well, while thousands of Americans regularly dress up in the uniforms their great-great-grandparents would have worn and spend weekends refighting famous battles.

The only other period in history which comes remotely close to the ACW in terms of coverage from the computer games industry is the Second World War. Given that the latter conflict saw anything up to 60 million people die, while 'only' 600,000 died in the American Civil War, and given that WW2 involved conflict of one sort or another on every continent while the American Civil War was largely restricted to within the dis-United States, the preponderance of games relating to the ACW at times seems



YOUNG AMERICA AND OLD IRELAND
ONE AND INSEPARABLE!
The COTTON-LORDS and TRAITOR-ALLIES of ENGLAND Must be Put Down!
ONCE FOR ALL--ONCE AND FOR EVER!
IRISHMEN, TO THE FIELD!
Irishmen up, Arm and Strike Victoriously for
DEMOCRACY AND LIBERTY!
The Rights and Power of the People.
THE GALLANT COLONEL OF THE
69th,
FIFTY ACTIVE YOUNG IRISHMEN.
Apply immediately to Col. Galligher, at the Head-Quarters of the Irish Dragoons, N. W. corner 7th and Chestnut Sts.



Left: "Then they asked me to command the Union army... which was nice"
Above: Men from many different nations and ethnic groups took part in the war
Right: Sid Meier's Gettysburg - a general sticks his hand in to point the way

inexplicable. ACW games have also not always been exactly synonymous with quality and excellence, with one or two notable exceptions which unfortunately just tend to highlight the failings of the rest.

The problem is that too many publishers believe that because there are large numbers of ACW games on the market, there must be a pool of gamers who will quite happily consume any old tat vaguely related to the Civil War era. Software developers and publishers are loathe to initiate projects which do not appeal in some way shape or form to the vast and potentially lucrative American market. They've got their eye on the fast buck, and who can blame them?

There are two problems with such an approach, however. The first is that hardcore wargamers have become much more sophisticated in their tastes over the last few years. They are now deliberately seeking out obscure areas of history and eagerly learning more about battles, campaigns and wars which would have been no more than historical footnotes a decade ago. The ACW is now of much less interest to them.

AMERICAN BIAS

The second is that the market is in danger of becoming saturated with second rate products. Whenever an industry believes it has a captive audience, it becomes lazy.

Furthermore, not all computer strategy gamers are American, and consumers in the UK and Europe are beginning to question why computer wargames should be so biased towards American tastes.

Granted, the ACW has been extremely popular with British and German wargamers in particular over the last 20 years; but there are now growing demands for more games which reflect European history – or even the history of parts of the rest of the world, such as South America, China, Japan or Africa.

This is undoubtedly one of the most contentious issues in wargaming – perhaps even in the wider strategy gaming hobby – at the moment. Why is the English Civil War completely ignored by games developers? What about World War I, the Crusades, the Hundred Years War (with fixtures such as Agincourt and Crecy), the Boer War? There seem to be rich seams of history which remain unexplored.

If this all sounds like I'm beginning to rant, you have to understand that I've been playing a lot of these ACW games recently, and consequently feel just like I do after a Friday night session with Madame Zara, the uber-dominatrix on full, no holds barred, humiliation mode.

But I have to admit that I'm probably being a bit too harsh. Prolonged over-exposure in a concentrated period of time to any one particular gaming genre (and its shortcomings, problems and general annoyances) is bound to render the discerning reviewer at least a little jaundiced.

Also, perhaps I'm approaching it from the wrong angle. This year I have mostly been playing such sumptuous strategy fests as Homeworld, Rogue Spear, C&C Tiberian Sun, Close Combat III, AoE II et al. Now all these games manage to combine, to a greater or lesser extent, nice graphics, relatively intuitive interfaces, not unreasonable levels of depth and, most importantly, compulsive gameplay within a nicely packaged real-time framework.

So to be forced to spend a week or two looking at a collection of largely turn-based, 2D, hex driven engines could well be enough to overthrow the sanity of a fat, gaming sloth, too used to having his strategy fed to him by numbers, on nice silverware, by over indulgent nanny-ish games developers...

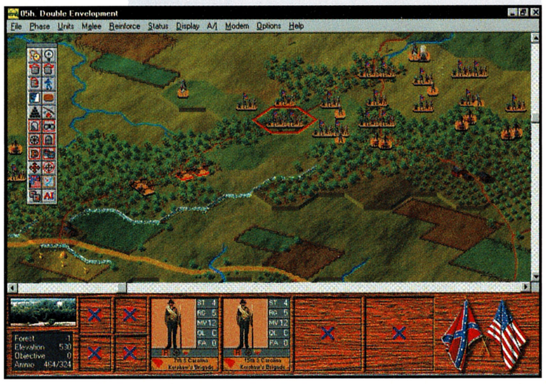
But beneath the often stodgy looks and the over-fiddly interface of the average ACW game can lurk some hidden strategy gaming jewels – and if you're a serious computer wargamer, or a more general strategy gamer looking for a different sort of challenge, then there are some ACW wargames that would be well worth the time invested in learning how to play them.

What follows is a whistle stop tour of some of the better ACW games to come our way in the past few years. Maybe there's life in the old war-horse yet...

TALONSOFT'S BATTLEGROUND SERIES

The Battleground series from Baltimore-based developer Talonsoft has been around for donkey's years. It's had a number of incarnations and has in fact been used to simulate a diverse selection of conflicts and battles ranging from the Napoleonic

Below: It's table top wargaming ported to a PC. Gaming nirvana for some...



Top American Civil War Flicks

If you can't face a hard evening's slogging away at the keyboard, or if you just want some visual muzak running in the background to get you into the right mood for a crack at Gettysburg! or one of the other games we've mentioned, here's a few suggestions for some movies you could put on the video.

GLORY

Poignant, stirring tale, centring on the 54th Massachusetts regiment – the first unit of black soldiers to be allowed to fight rather than dig latrines. The 54th was commanded by Robert Gould Shaw (Matthew Broderick), a noted white abolitionist who argued that blacks had as much right to fight against the South as whites. It provides an interesting insight into the hypocrisies of the ideology of abolitionism. The direction is superb and the battle scenes are handled with rare skill. We accompany the men of the 54th as they struggle for acceptance as a viable combat outfit on a par with their white comrades. The denouement, revolving around the 54th's heroic but ultimately futile attack on Fort Sumter, ranks among the best you're likely to see. Superb.

THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY

The third in the peerless Sergio Leone's 'Dollars' trilogy, and arguably the best, with the ACW as a background and some fine battle sequences. Fantastic performances from Clint Eastwood (below), reprising his 'man with no name' role, Lee Van Cleef as the quintessential bad guy and Eli Wallach who steals the show as the bumbling, picaresque Tuco. The archetypal spaghetti Western and the standard against which all others are judged. It's worth watching for Ennio Morricone's soundtrack alone. So good it's almost criminal. A must.

THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES

Once again, Clint bestrides the silver screen in this superb quasi-civil war movie which deals with the unpalatable underbelly of the war – the guerrilla raiders, such as the Kansas redlegs, who terrorised civilian populations on both sides and committed horrific atrocities in the process. Clint plays Josey Wales, driven to becoming a Confederate raider by the murder of his family by a Union guerrilla band. He strikes out to find a new life in Texas, but is hounded by his old nemesis Terill, played with palpable menace by the cruelly underrated Don McKinney. Arguably one of the best 'warts and all' revisionist westerns, which presaged Eastwood's magnum opus, Unforgiven.

GONE WITH THE WIND

One of the all time greats of American cinema. Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh turn in bravura performances as the movie's star-crossed lovers. Some wonderfully panoramic, and for the time, ground-breaking battle scenes. Interesting in that it provides an insight into the material and social

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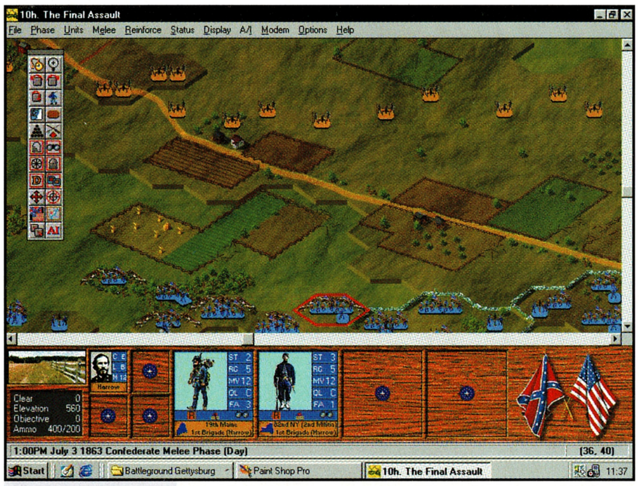


Above: Union troops are dug in, so the Rebs have produced some artillery to shift them

wars right up to the Battle of the Bulge in 1944.

But the majority of the games in the series are ACW titles, including such notable battles as Bull Run, Shiloh, Gettysburg, Chickamauga and Antietam. Within each of these games, there are other, smaller maps and different scenarios, so that almost all of the major and minor battles of the ACW are covered.

The engine used in each game is virtually identical, and apart from a few minor tweaks and aesthetic enhancements, gameplay across the board is a pretty uniform experience. Not that there's anything wrong with this modular approach to gaming — just ask Westwood, who've managed to repackage and sell the same, admittedly rather good, game (Command & Conquer) to the gaming public, on at least three separate occasions. And it has the advantage that anyone who has played one of the Battleground series will be able to play another of them immediately.

TAKING A VIEW

So, what do you get when you pop one of the Battleground series onto your hard drive? If you choose the 3D view option, then basically what you see is a table top wargame brought to life in glorious technicolour on your PC; opt for the 2D view (you can switch backwards and forwards during the game), and you're effectively playing a board wargame, complete with hexagon-gridded map.

If you know anything about Talonsoft and its history, this will come as no surprise. Until its take-over by GT Interactive just over a year ago, Talonsoft was the self-styled master of the hardcore computer wargaming world.

It has a reputation for producing very competent games aimed at a very specific constituency, and indeed the Battleground series (and the later East Front series) serve the needs of this constituency rather well. Talonsoft's ACW outings are no exception.

You get a faithful recreation of the theatre of battle (with lovingly detailed maps produced by an artist on paper) and you get all the units, equipment and commanders you would expect.

There are campaign modes, individual battles, historical and ahistorical scenarios, all solidly and faithfully created for your delectation. You also get a large dollop of background history and detailed information concerning the battle of your choice. All in all, the Battleground series appears to embody the very epitome of traditional computer strategy gaming, and if that's how you like it, you won't go far wrong.

There are problems though. The AI is decidedly creaky, and though it improved as the series progressed, even in the later games it's still far too easy to lure your opponent into crossfires, traps, flanking manoeuvres, encirclements etc.

This for me is where the Battlefield games begin to experience a large credibility problem. So much effort goes into creating historically accurate scenarios, completely authentic in every respect, and within half an hour the whole illusion is completely shattered simply because you're playing an AI opponent with the tactical acumen of a troop of girl guides. Not good.

Another problem is that by now the Battleground series is, to put it mildly, looking a bit long in the tooth. Chickamauga, the last offering in the series was released in September '99 but looked and played like something from the late '80s. We strategy gamers are a cerebral lot and in the past have put up with shoddy gameplay characteristics, lacklustre graphics and dubious design to indulge our strange and inexplicable passion for such elusive concepts as depth, longevity, challenge, stimulation and realism. But it's now time for Battleground to be laid to rest quietly and unobtrusively. Talonsoft should take a leaf out of Sid Meier's book. Gettysburg! (see above right) wasn't perfect but it is the way to go.

I'd like to see some nice 3D graphics please (just because it's a 'serious' strategy game doesn't mean it has to look like something I ran on a Vic20 two decades ago), some first person perspectives a la Dungeon Keeper, where the commander can instantly obtain a battlefield view from any member of his force, more intuitive control interfaces, tougher AI and a melding of RTS and turn-based playing options providing the discerning gamer with a choice of play styles.

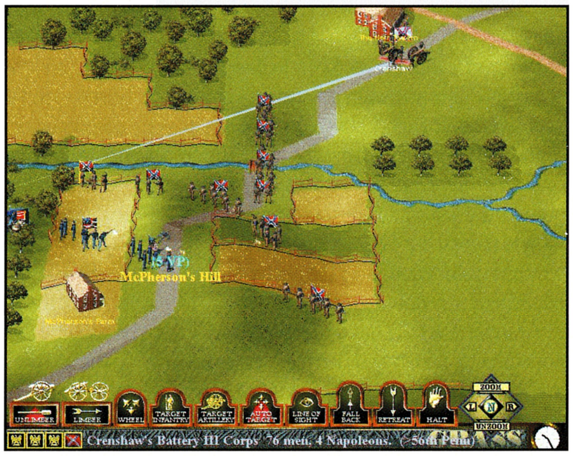
It's not too much to ask and its eminently achievable. Here's to the next generation of ACW war games based along these lines. I for one won't be betting the mortgage on their appearance anytime soon. Still, you never know, maybe in a year's time serious strategy gaming will have become the new rock and roll...

SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG!

Now this is the way to do it. Sid Meier's Gettysburg! is the shining star in the ACW firmament. Meier is better known for his epic empire/civilisation building games, but has, over his long and varied career, dabbled in virtually every genre conceivable.

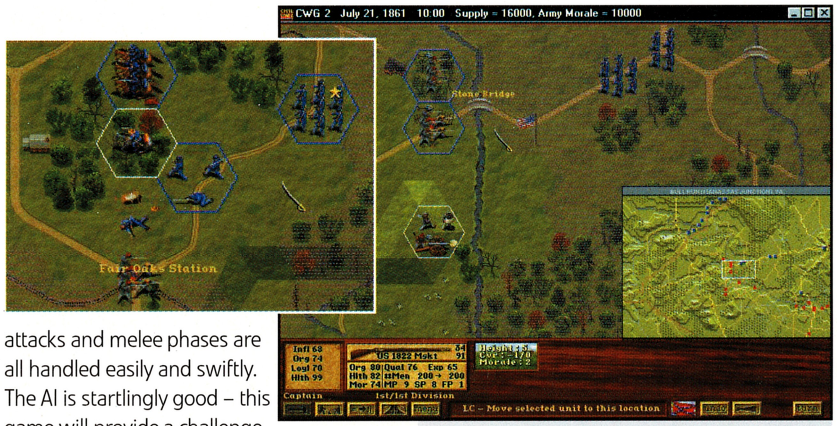
With this foray into the world of hardcore wargaming, he successfully managed to shake things up through his willingness to move outside the conventions which so often hamstring the genre. Right, so what's so revolutionary about it?

Below: The rebs assault Mcpherson's hill; the bluebellies give 'em what for



Well, for a start it looks good. It's not quite up there with Homeworld, but for an ACW war game it's a veritable visual feast. And there's no problem identifying and maintaining control of your units when things begin to hot up – you don't have to spend hours squinting painfully at the screen trying to make some sense of a tangle of vaguely discernible units.

It's got an excellent, clutter free, highly intuitive interface. You move by clicking a mouse button. Changing formation, missile



Above: **CWGII's odd cartoony-style graphics grow on you after a while**

attacks and melee phases are all handled easily and swiftly. The AI is startlingly good – this game will provide a challenge for even the most hardened strategy-meister.

All this is very, very nice indeed, but the most stand out aspect of Gettysburg! is the fact that it's real time. I know that will have the purists reaching for their forage caps and heading for the door, but it works and it works well in Gettysburg!

This is not C&C transposed onto ACW. It merely incorporates an efficient, viable real time engine into a damn fine strategy game. Yes, it is possible to play Gettysburg! at arcade game speeds if you wish, but you'll miss out on the depth and breadth woven into the game's fabric. Slow it down a little, and while you still experience discernible adrenaline rushes, you begin to revel in the strategic level opportunities afforded by the engine. If you buy only one Civil War game, make it this one; and if you've been put off by the real time nature of the game or the fact that Sid Meier's name adorns the cover, don't – add it to your collection immediately.

CIVIL WAR GENERALS 2

Civil War Generals 2, developed by Impressions and published by Sierra, is another solid but in some ways uninspiring ACW outing – to begin with, it's your standard turn based hex driven affair.

The graphics are unusual and have an almost cartoon-esque feel to them. They are, however, clear and easily discernible, and in the general scheme of things work quite well. The only complaint about the graphics is that at times your units and those of the enemy engage in combat while apparently having their backs turned to each other...

In terms of depth, Impressions went to great length to ensure a wide variety of options are featured. You've got over 46 scenarios to choose from containing a grand total of 117 campaigns; and if that isn't enough for you, quite frankly you've got Civil War Psychosis and you need help fast.

The AI is decent, there are three levels of difficulty to choose from, and on the advanced setting you'll definitely get a run for your money. In my humble opinion Civil War Generals is a better bet than any of the Talonsoft battleground series. It's comprehensive and involving, doesn't limit you to one particular battle, and unusually for a turn based affair, can get the old adrenaline flowing in appreciable quantities.

Unfortunately, it falls between two stools. It's not hardcore enough to appeal to your dyed-in-the-wool wargames fanatic, but it's not immediately accessible enough to appeal to a non-wargame oriented constituency.

Sierra have also included an excellent history supplement which will effortlessly bring civil war newbies up to speed and provide a few golden nuggets for the old hands. It's got its problems, but as traditional ACW strategy gaming goes, this is one of the better examples available.

NORTH VS SOUTH

I-Magic's North Vs South represents one of the singularly most depressing gameplay experiences I've ever subjected my unfortunate self to. There's a kernel of a good game sequestered away somewhere inside this strange confection, but it's unreachable due to one of the most ludicrous, cumbersome and counter-intuitive command and control systems ever to (dis)grace a war game.

Essentially the system revolves around your commanders and the number of movement points allocated to each. Units directly under the auspices of a particular commander cost relatively little to move, those not directly under his control cost more and so on.

I can see what I-magic's developers have tried to do here and can only commend them for making the effort. They're trying to incorporate the inherent difficulties of command and control faced by American Civil War generals on the battlefield into the game's system. Entirely laudable, and in many ways desirable — but surely not at the cost of playability and ease of use. ▶▶

. . .continued from page 85

devastation inflicted on the populace and infrastructure of the south as a result of the prosecution of the war.

GETTYSBURG

Tom Berenger and Martin Sheen play Union commander Longstreet and Confederate commander Lee respectively in this epic battle recreation. Once you get over the extremely high 'improbable beard quotient' the movie is actually quite good. It is, however, over four hours long and best viewed in two sittings. Definitely not for the faint-hearted, but Civil War buffs and general military historians alike should be pleased as all the elements within the battle, such as Pickett's Charge, are faithfully recreated.

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

John Huston's excellent film treatment of Stephen Crane's seminal war novel is a meditation on the nature of heroism, cowardice and individual courage. The hero is played, incongruously enough, by Hollywood's quintessential All-American good guy, Audie Murphy. The impact of the movie is somewhat diluted by an overly facile resolution, but it's certainly worth the price of admission and marks an important turning point in Hollywood's treatment of the Civil War.

RIDE WITH THE DEVIL

The latest addition to the ranks of civil war celluloid. Much like The Outlaw Josey Wales, the story revolves around the guerrilla war fought around the Kansas and Missouri border. The film is largely a rites of passage movie, starring a host of brat pack faces such as Skeet Ulrich (pictured below). Don't be expecting any epoch making insights into the nature or conduct of the civil war — it's bubblegum for the brain which looks good and is, by and large, competently directed. Notable also for the fact that angelic Alaskan super songstress Jewel makes an appearance or two, which quite frankly is recommendation enough for me.

THE HORSE SOLDIERS

OK, so it's not the best Civil war movie you're ever likely to see, but I'll be damned if I'm going to produce a list of Civil War movies without mentioning The Duke. Wayne plays Colonel John Marlowe, commander of a unit of Union cavalry sent behind rebel lines to stir up trouble and generally cause havoc. Naturally as The Duke is in command they succeed admirably. Enjoyable old school romp, perfect for a wet Sunday afternoon. Interestingly it's actually based on the real life exploits of Colonel Benjamin H Grierson who led 1,700 Union soldiers through Confederate held central Mississippi, tearing up railway lines as they went.

Piccadilly Lily

2 THEATRES OF WAR. ONE OBJECTIVE.
TOTAL VICTORY

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WWII AIR COMBAT STRATEGY GAME
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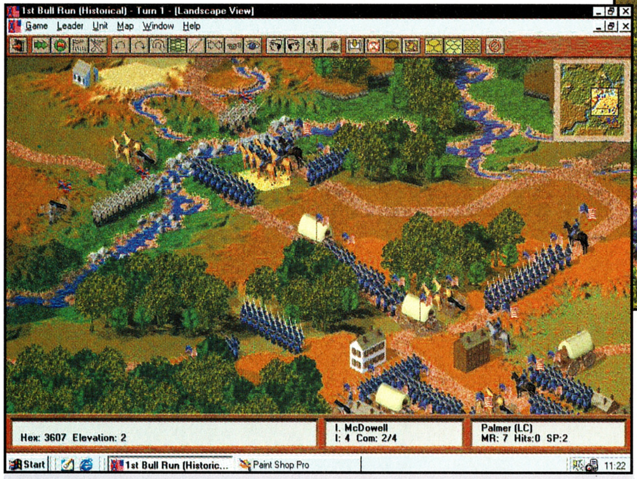
1st Bull Run (Historical) - Turn 1 - [Landscape View]
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Palmer (LC)
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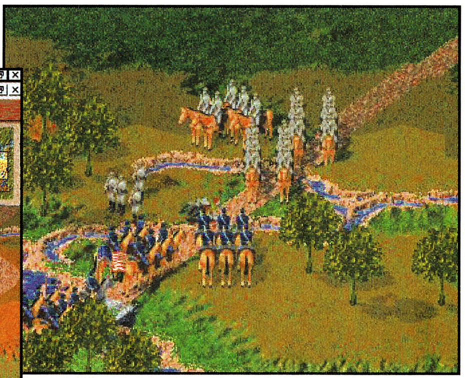


Above: High-adrenalin wargame action as an unknown gamer adroitly executes the highly dangerous 'Over the bridge quick without annoying the lads in grey' manoeuvre

The system is so fiddly and unwieldy that it renders the game virtually unplayable.

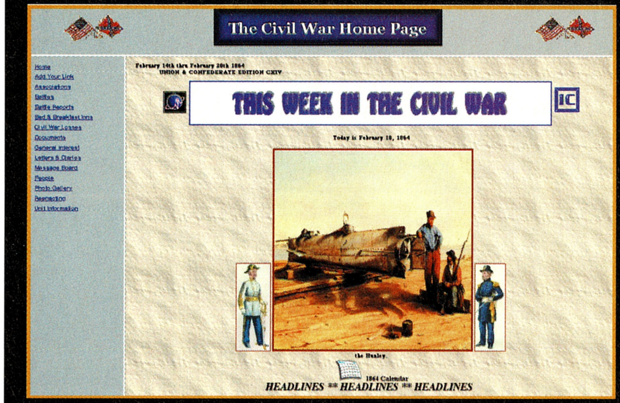
The movement phase in North vs South is undoubtedly one of the most laboured, drawn out and over-intricate I've ever encountered. Consequently the game is time consuming to an almost outlandish degree and you'll get precious little return for all your pointing and clicking.

On the plus side, North vs South doesn't look too bad; perhaps a little dated, but perfectly servicable. Video cut scenes are good and you get do get to play the most pivotal battles in the war – Antietam, Gettysburg, the first and second Bull Run etc... The AI is surprisingly good and will definitely provide a challenge.

North Vs South also makes good use of morale, which is an element often overlooked in games of this nature. I particularly like the way in which units will not only suffer morale hits for engaging in combat or coming under fire, but also for crossing difficult terrain or entering rivers.

This game contains some good concepts and ideas, but unfortunately they're all couched within such a ridiculous interface that very few people will stick around to appreciate them. PCSG.

Civil War websites



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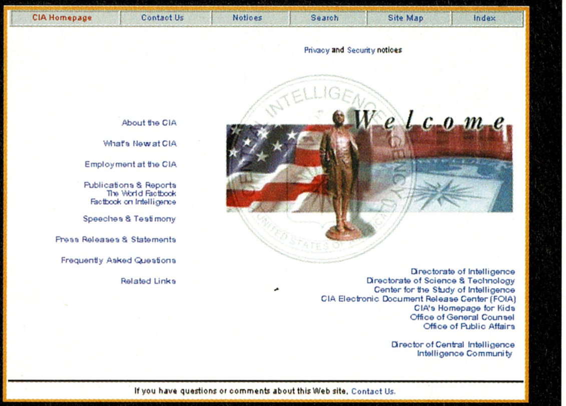

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Intelligence Community
If you have questions or comments about this Web site, Contact Us.

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR HOMEPAGE:
HTTP://SUNSITE.UTK.EDU/CIVIL-WAR
This is an absolutely excellent site, which almost re-affirms your faith in the web's possibilities as a viable didactic medium. It contains all sorts of historical data related to the ACW, ranging from literature, documentation and personal diaries through to regimental rosters and in depth battle/campaign analysis etc. The site's a brilliant general civil war resource and an excellent starting point for any would be Civil War historian.

THE CIVIL WAR HOMEPAGE:
HTTP://WWW.CIVIL-WAR.NET/
Another excellent general Civil War site. Provides all sorts of links and information. You can access information on each specific battle and battlefield from this site. It also contains documents, genealogies, diaries, photographs etc. A superb resource which leaves no stone unturned. If you can't find it here, you're probably not going to find it at all.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS
HTTP://WWW.ODCI.GOV/CIA/PUBLICATIONS/DISPATCHES/INTRO.HTML
I highlighted this particular site because it deals with an element of ACW history all too often neglected by conventional histories of the period. This link will take you to a CIA site which houses articles published in the CIA journal, Studies in Intelligence. This particular piece is an interesting and thought provoking article which seeks to examine the quite considerable impact which the intelligence provided by black operatives exerted on the outcome of the war. Well written, it continues an interesting debate into a facet of ACW history which is too often ignored or under-estimated by more conventionally oriented commentators on the era.

RE-ENACTMENT GROUPS:
HTTP://WWW.69THNYSV.ORG/
The huge level of interest in the American Civil War has spawned countless re-enactment groups. This one is for the 'Fighting 69th', an Irish regiment, just to give you a flavour of what these groups get up to. They can be fascinating sites to peruse due to the level of minutiae which their members are prepared to go into. They may be amateur enthusiasts but a lot of these sites are very good quality, and provide a fascinating insight into a whole sub-culture spawned by ACW devotees. Also check out the basic equipment you're required to have as a member of the re-enactment group – right down to the type of undies. Fascinating stuff.

WWW.FIRAXIS.COM/ANTIETAM
Check out Firaxis' excellent site for all the latest news on Sid Meier's Antietam! – undoubtedly the most significant development of late in the ACW gaming arena. It's an extremely comprehensive site, which details all the additions, tweaks and twiddles and will no doubt delight and titillate in equal measure. All the new unit types are detailed and you can even access neat little graphics of each. The site also provides some excellent links to a range of other sites of general ACW interest.

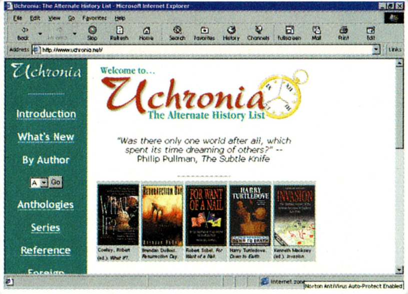
Visitors from cyberspace

The good, the bad and the ugly – it's all out there on the world wide web and we at PCSG log onto a few favorites that never cease to amuse, edify and entertain

www.uchronia.net

I love alternative history – novels, short stories, films and TV series that ask 'what if?' What if Kennedy hadn't been assassinated; what if Hitler had won World War 2; what if the South had won the American Civil War; what if King Charles I had won the English Civil War... So when I found this particular website, I was bowled over. And that was a year and a half ago – since then, it's gone through huge changes and what was an extremely good, if a bit hobbyish, site has become an extremely slick, professional operation, without losing its core authority and interest.

Right: A slick site for 'what if' historians


Uchronia: The Alternate History List - Microsoft Internet Explorer

http://www.uchronia.net/

Welcome to...

Uchronia

The Alternate History List

"Was there only one world after all, which spent its time dreaming of others?" -- Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*

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Cowley, Robert (ed.), What If?
Brendan DuBois, Resurrection Day
Robert Sobel, For Want of a Nail
Harry Turtledove, Down to Earth
Kenneth Macksey (ed.), Invasion
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Quote

> **www.imdb renews one's faith in the web's potential as an effective medium for the dissemination of information**

Unquote

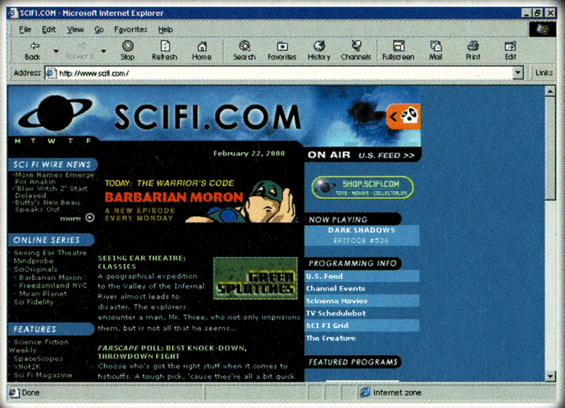
As the site itself says in the introduction: "Alternate history is the description of an historical 'what if' and its possible consequences. Such material may also be called alternative histories, allohistories, counterfactuals... Whatever it is named, alternate history somehow involves one or more past events which 'happened otherwise' and includes some amount of description of the subsequent effects on history."

Uchronia.net provides a list of alternative history material (mainly novels and short stories), a 'timeline' showing when different authors' alternate histories have diverged from the real world, a cover artwork gallery, links to other alternate history or related sites, its own Oscar-style honours, the Sidewise Awards, and a search facility.

Absolutely superb. Exactly what a fan website should be. Martin Croft

www.Scifi.com

Scifi.com is the online presence of the Sci-Fi channel. It also sports a UK site, and represents an excellent resource for anyone interested in Science Fiction in general. The focus is on Sci-Fi developments in film and television. You'll get the lowdown on all the latest series emerging from the States, plot lines, characters etc... You can also access the excellent sci-fi wire which has all the latest news and gossip. Who's in the running to play Annakin in the next Star Wars outing? Why is the next Blair Witch movie experiencing difficulties? All the burning questions and issues are analysed and debated. There's also games and book reviews and endless reams of the sort of sci-fi trivia beloved by fans and devotees. The site's uncluttered, easy to navigate and well constructed. A bookmark must for lovers of sci-fi. Barry Ryan


SCIFI.COM - Microsoft Internet Explorer

http://www.scifi.com/

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TODAY: *THE WARRIOR'S CODE*

BARBARIAN MORON

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A geographical expedition to the Valley of the Infernal River almost leads to disaster. The explorers encounter a man, Mr. Three, who not only imprisons them, but is not all that he seems...

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-Buffy's New Beau Speaks Out
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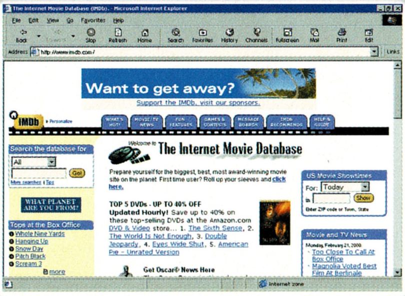
Above: Sci-fi trivia heaven...

www.imdb.com

This site probably requires little introduction, but it's one of our favourites and no low-down on the best on the web would be complete without it. This is the sort of site which tends to renew one's faith in the web's potential as an effective medium for the dissemination of information. After hours surfing through the endless commercially exploitative, badly-designed tat, bilge and drivel which has become so prevalent on the world wide wait, sorry web, I like to drop in on the Internet Movie


The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). - Microsoft Internet Explorer

http://www.imdb.com/

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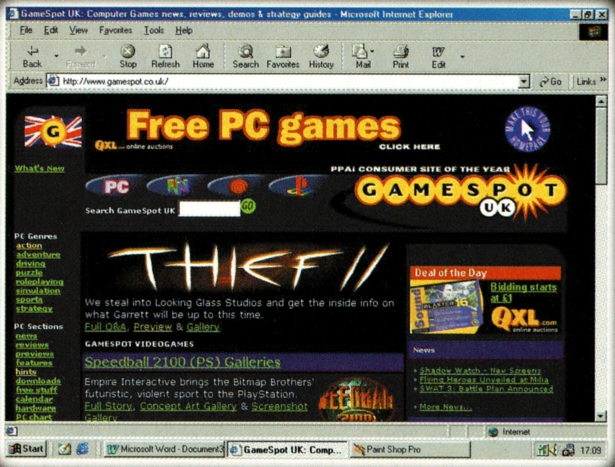
Above: Encyclopaedic resource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More News...
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GameSpot UK: Comp...
Paint Shop Pro
17:09

We steal into Looking Glass Studios and get the inside info on what Garrett will be up to this time.

Empire Interactive brings the Bitmap Brothers' futuristic, violent sport to the PlayStation.

Above: A short-cut to gaming genius?

Database to re-establish my belief in the online revolution. This is a truly encyclopaedic site which contains all the celluloid related information which you could ever want or indeed need to know. Need to bone up on the French New Wave, or perhaps re-acquaint yourself with the politics and ideology underlying Battleship Potemkin? This is the place to come. Filmographies, biographies, promotional posters, the latest Hollywood gossip, it's all at your fingertips here. In terms of design, it's a masterpiece of function over form.

The focus of the IMDB is to get you to the information you want as quickly as possible. No tacky promotional banners or commercial tie-ins. This is the film resource to bookmark. Barry Ryan

www.gamespot.co.uk

A fine, all-round magazine site, Gamespot has news, reviews, tips and walkthroughs. It also offers screenshots of old and up-coming games, patches, demos, a game release calendar, online auctions and links to associated sites and online shops.

Like all such net magazines, Gamespot demands two things – a willingness to read long sections of text off screen and a fast netlink. If you have a slow connection, or your web provider is busy, the painful download time for each 500 word page can defeat the most patient.

Gamespot features and reviews are generally well-balanced and well-written. My only gripe is the fact that they will review games that are still in the development stage as if they were fully completed.

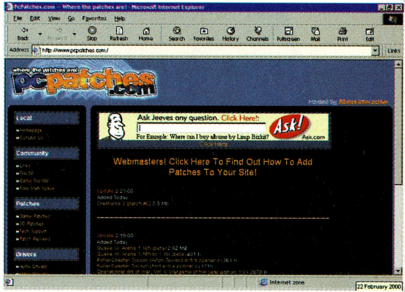
The main use for Gamespot, I find, is their extensive walkthrough library – ahem – not that I ever use it myself, oh no... Stuck on a game at two in the morning and a swift check of the relevant Gamespot section will save you much hair-tearing. Barry Ryan.

www.pcpatches.com

In a perfect world, we'd toodle off down to our local purveyor of PC games oh, say, once a month, shell out our hard earned cash for the latest gaming extravaganza, and skip home to our high powered gaming rigs, safe in the knowledge that our purchase will play exactly as god and the development team (in that order) intended, straight from the box.

Unfortunately, such a utopian vision of the gamer's lot has not yet been realised. In reality, it's more likely that the software you've just bought will require a patch of some sort to ensure it plays as it should. This is one of the most contentious issues facing the gaming world at the minute. Whatever the rights and wrongs of it, patching has become an inescapable fact of gaming life. pcpatches.com represents one of the best online resources in this respect (for general games, that is: for strategy games, you should of course first check out our website, pcstrategygames.com).

pcpatches.com has got an extensive back-catalogue of patches for practically every game you can think of. It's also updated every day with the latest patches for the latest releases. The site also includes many mods and add-ons for various titles. If you can't get the patch you need here it probably hasn't been released yet. Until the games industry gets its act together, having a site like this at your disposal is a must. Barry Ryan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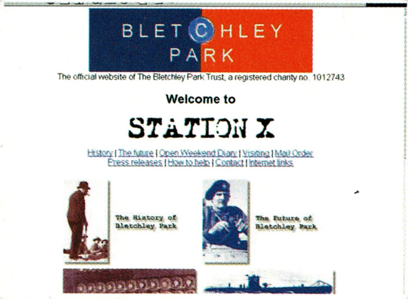
Webmasters! Click Here To Find Out How To Add Patches To Your Site!

Above: Patching up poorly games

www.bletchleypark.org.uk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Press releases | How to help | Contact | Internet links
The History of Bletchley Park
The Future of Bletchley Park

The official website of The Bletchley Park Trust, a registered charity no. 1012743

Above: Recalling a heroic past

The story of Bletchley Park was, until only a few years ago, top secret – or perhaps more appropriately, Ultra top secret, because it was from Bletchley Park that the efforts to crack the German war machine's codes were masterminded. The intelligence that came out of the various huts in the grounds of this Victorian English manor house was for the eyes of the highest Allied commanders only, and the whole project became known by the stamp which appeared on the printouts – Ultra.

Now, Bletchley Park has its own website, where you can learn about the history of codebreaking in the Second World War and what the manor house is currently being used for. It's particularly appropriate that the Bletchley Park Trust is using the Internet to try to secure the site's future, because Bletchley Park also played a vital role in the history of the computer. It was here that the mathematical genius Alan Turing and others created the blueprint for the world's first true computer (built by the specialist engineers of the General Post Office, the forerunner to the Royal Mail and BT). While Ultra didn't win the war for the Allies, it certainly shortened it, by at least two years. Unfortunately, what Hitler's bombs couldn't do – the Germans never knew what was going on behind the ivy covered walls – developers (and British Government neglect) almost achieved. Now, though, Bletchley Park has been saved for posterity – almost. The Bletchley Park Trust has come up with a plan to turn much of the site into a museum, educational centre and conference venue – but it needs to raise £1.5 million (that's about £1 for every minute the codebreakers' work shortened the war by). This is a solid, no-nonsense site that delivers the core information clearly and concisely. Martin Croft

Unweaving the world's greatest city

Jonathan Schneer
London 1900
The Imperial Metropolis
1700
Scenes from London Life
by Maureen Waller

Cities are strange things, as anyone who has played either SimCity or Caesar will confirm. We may think we build them, but actually they are complex organisms, growing according to a series of sets of rules which we are only just beginning to understand.

A couple of new books have just been published which should provide an insight into the evolution of cities, and in particular, the world's greatest city, London (not that we're biased, or anything).

Maureen Waller's **1700: Scenes from London Life** (Hodder & Stoughton, hb, £20.00) is a wonderful portrait of London at the turn of the 18th Century; a new city arising from the ashes of the Great Fire of 1666. In fact, London had gone through unprecedented upheaval in the past 60 years: the Civil War, the execution of King Charles I, the Commonwealth, the Restoration of Charles II, the Great Plague, the Great Fire, the Glorious Revolution...

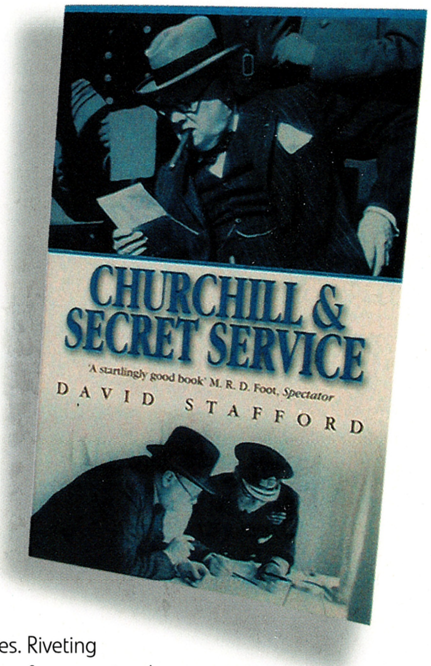
Now, in 1700, London is one of the world's great mercantile centres and a Mecca for arts and sciences, standing on the edge of the Enlightenment. But while modern science was just being born, London was in many ways an ancient city, full of vice, depravity and death. Waller explores both sides of the equation, examining social issues, how people ate, drank and relaxed, attitudes to immigrants, the poor and the underworld. It's a fascinating exploration of a city on the edge of greatness.

Move forward 200 years and we come to Jonathan Schneer's **London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis** (Yale University Press, hb, US import, c £19.95). If London in 1700 was on the edge of greatness, London in 1900 was arguably at the end of greatness – not exactly decadent, but perhaps at the start of a transitional period which would be accelerated 14 years later by the Great War.

Denser and a little drier than Waller's work, Schneer's book is still an extremely erudite and, in its own way, challenging reading of the history of London – indeed of the British Empire, looking in particular detail at the part played in painting the map of the world pink by those who were not native to London or even England.

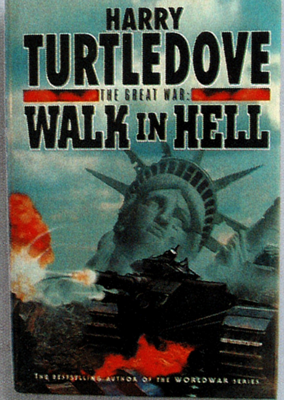
In the 1900s, it was London more than New York that was the melting pot of the world, and immigrants were in many cases the driving force of British Imperialism.

Talking about British Imperialism, **Churchill & Secret Service** (Abacus History, pb, £9.99), by David Stafford, explores the relationship between one of the world's staunchest supporters of the Empire, Sir Winston Churchill, and the intelligence services. Churchill, far more than any other British politician, was fascinated by the shadow world of the spy, the saboteur and the irregular soldier.

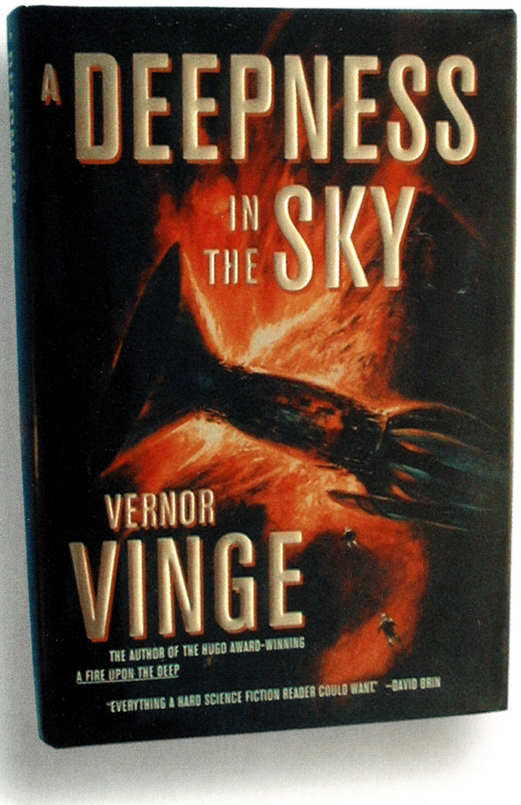

CHURCHILL & SECRET SERVICE
'A startlingly good book' M. R. D. Foot, Spectator
DAVID STAFFORD

This book looks at his involvement with the British and American secret services, and in particular with the creation of the Special Operations Executive during the Second World War. It also examines the use of Ultra intelligence, the top secret information resulting from the cracking of the German Enigma codes. Riveting and stuffed full of evidence from previously unrevealed sources, this book is a must for any serious student of the intelligence service and/or guerrilla warfare.

Now for some hardcore science fiction. Vernor Vinge's **A Deepness in the Sky** (Tor, hb, US import, c £17.99) is a prequel to his superb novel, A Fire Upon the Deep, which won him a Hugo Award (Science Fiction's equivalent of the Oscars). Set 30,000 years before the first book, A Deepness in the Sky pits two interstellar trading fleets against each other. Both are waiting for a star to turn back on again, so triggering the



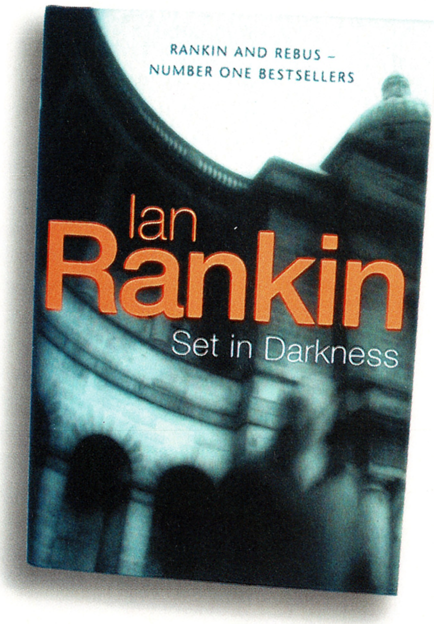
That's enough historical stuff: as an alternative, try the latest in Harry Turtledove's 'what if?' series, **The Great War: A Walk in Hell** (Hodder & Stoughton, hb, £16.99). Turtledove is regarded by many as the king of the alternate history book, and he's certainly the most prolific – in addition to the Great War series, he's also got a second series on the go, the Worldwar series. In the latter, the Second World War is interrupted by an alien invasion by a race of green lizardmen. In the former, the South wins the American Civil War, which precipitates decades of hot and cold war between the Union and the Confederacy, including a second War between the States in the 1880s. It's now 1915, and the First World War has started. But in this timeline, the Union is allied with Imperial Germany, while the Confederacy is on the side of the Allies, so the horrors of the trenches occur on American soil as well as in Flanders field. Turtledove's prose and plotting veer occasionally towards the melodramatic, but his ideas are good and it's a ripping read. If you like alternate histories – and let's face it, if you play computer games with historic settings, you must, because you're creating them – then buy it.


A DEEPNESS IN THE SKY
VERNOR VINGE
THE AUTHOR OF THE HUGO AWARD-WINNING A FIRE UPON THE DEEP
"EVERYTHING A HARD SCIENCE FICTION READER COULD WANT" —DAVID BRIN

reawakening of a planet's dormant species, the Spiders.

But while the Queng Ho want to learn from and trade with the Spiders, the Emergents want to enslave them. Almost destroyed by an Emergent attack, the Queng Ho have to regroup and learn to fight back if they are to help the Spiders escape the threat of tyranny; meanwhile, the Spiders have to bootstrap themselves back to a level of technology where they can play a part themselves.

Vinge is a supreme master at creating alien cultures – and his aliens will sometimes be human and sometimes be very unhuman. An excellent read.



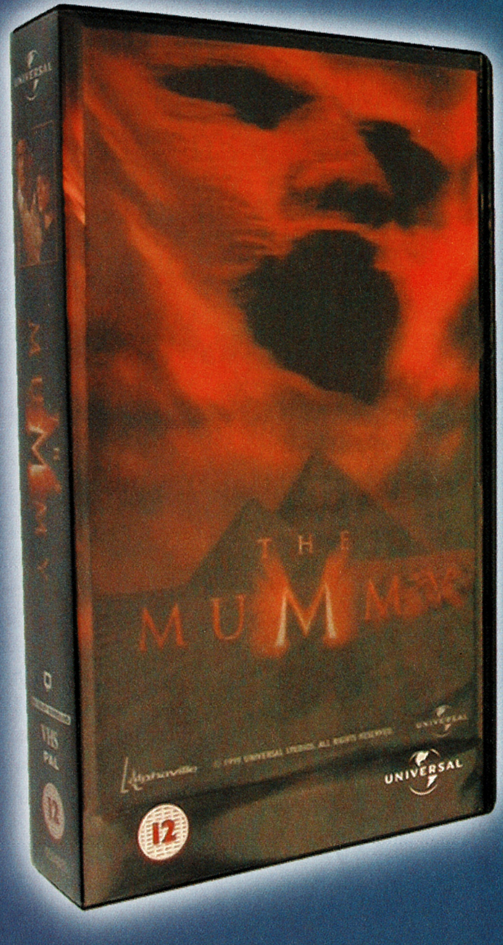
Also brilliant, but taking place in Edinburgh rather than deep space, is Ian Rankin's **Set in Darkness** (Orion, hb, £16.99), the latest novel featuring his troubled but brilliant hero, Detective Inspector John Rebus.

Anyone who knows anything about the history of puzzles and word games will know that a rebus is a visual pun based on someone's name, which is a good indication of the sort of cerebral mystery that Rankin excels at.

This time around, Rebus has to deal with the murder of a prospective member of the new Scottish Parliament, which is somehow tied in with the discovery of the site of a legendary murder, where a young man was roasted to death. Rebus' Edinburgh is a melting-pot of a city where the past and the present walk together, and this latest will confirm Rankin's position as one of the leading lights of British crime fiction - and perhaps just British fiction.

Standing alongside him, if there's any justice, will be Reginald Hill, who has created in Fat Andy Dalziel one of the greatest characters in British crime fiction. If your only contact with Dalziel and his sidekick Peter Pascoe is the admittedly excellent TV series, then rush out and fill your arms with Hill's previous books in paperback, because they are far, far better than the small screen could ever be (particularly The Wood Beyond and On Beulah Height). Then, once you've gorged yourself on them, you can read his latest, **Arms and the Women** (Harper Collins, hb, £16.99).

This time around, the focus for most of the book isn't on Dalziel or Pascoe, but on Pascoe's wife, Ellie, who finds herself enmeshed in a weird and seemingly improbable cocktail of IRA weapons smugglers, Colombian druglords, and women in search of themselves. Trapped in a remote cliffside house with a motley crew, Ellie has to save herself – and does so with typical Hill ingenuity. As with all his books, Hill interweaves ancient legends, modern concerns and personal relationships to create a heady brew. His plots are always character driven rather than action driven, and far the more believable for all that. Read it.



Video

THE MUMMY

If you liked Indiana Jones, then you'll love The Mummy (Universal Studios, VHS, £12.99). Starring Brendan Fraser (a much underrated actor with a considerable physical presence who also stars in George of the Jungle and Gods and Monsters) and the delectable Rachel Weisz, it's pure hokum and the sticklers for historical accuracy amongst us will have a hissy fit. No, not at the depiction of the Egypt of the Pharaohs (which is all rather impressive, in fact), but at the way 'modern' Egypt of the 1920s is shown: full of sleazy Midnight Express-style Turkish prison guards, American cowboys complete with six shooters and the odd Hollywood Mockney British soldier. And one solitary Royal Air Force pilot, the last one left in Cairo after the First World War. Fraser knows the way to the lost City of the Dead, while Weisz has a map showing the whereabouts of the Book of the Dead. So they get together and accidentally release the Mummy himself, victim of a terrible curse which makes him almost indestructible. Funny curse, that... If you can ignore the cartoon book rewriting of the recent past and concentrate on the clash between our heroes and the hideous evils from 3,000 years ago, you'll have enormous fun. Oh, and see if you can spot the deliberate reference to Indiana and his famous dislike for snakes...

Today Germany: tomorrow the world!

***Alan Emrich** puts an all-American gloss (complete with weird spellings!) on current trends in computer strategy gaming on the other side of the pond*

For the past several years that I've been a keen-eyed observer of this hobby, there has been a growing specter over the dominance of the US market in games: and that is Europe. What was once the 'tail' end of the business in now the tail that wags the dog when the big US publishers consider what kinds of game to produce, and this is especially true of computer strategy games.

Ask any game software publisher's marketing department, and they'll tell you that Europe is the hot spot of the world right now for computer game sales (particularly for strategy games), and that Germany is ground zero for every budget's sales projections. Not long ago, I was a game producer at Interplay Productions here in the States, and launched the Star Trek: Starfleet Command project.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

After one afternoon's taffy-pull with the S&M (sales and marketing) crowd while putting together a corporate ROI (Return On Investment) plan to justify funding the project – sorry for all the acronyms, but those S&M people speak in code, and I'm just trying to be accurate here – I was struck by how many times I heard 'Germany' during the meeting. Will they like it? How did the last RTS game do there?

Although half-German myself, I couldn't help but comment out loud that they sounded more like a meeting of the German-American Bund [*a pro-Nazi US group – ed*] from the 1930s than a group trying to market a great game.

Still, without six-figure (100,000 units) sales projected for Germany and at least an equal number for ROE (the Rest of Europe), and another six-figures for ROW (the Rest of the World) on top of that, the Return on Investment numbers for a project will probably not justify funding it.

So, my brothers across the pond, if you want to know why American software companies are now making more games that you are likely to be interested in than, say, five years ago, it's because you are now at the forefront of their decision making, from Sales & Marketing, right down to Design and 'Localization.' Speaking of Localization, you might not be aware what a nuisance this is. Localization means putting the game out in all the languages that Marketing says 'we must have'. Usually, this means French, German, Japanese, and British.

Oh, yes, British! Someone has to go through and add the unnecessary 'u' in 'color' and put the 'y' and 's' in 'tire' and 'civilization' (snigger). They usually don't change the audio files for you chaps in the Motherland, but for all I know that day is coming (to make sure that everyone speaking in your games doesn't sound like some flat-toned Yank).

The 'rising' languages today include Spanish, Finnish, and Portuguese. Danish, Norwegian, Swedish will occasionally come up, as well. It's interesting to hear the nervous laughter in the room when someone mentions doing a Chinese version (ostensibly for our friends in Taiwan and those remaining in Hong Kong). Chinese versions never occur for myriad reasons, including the sub-languages of Chinese and the fact that they are generally regarded as stealing game software almost as fast as American nuclear secrets.

The goal of Localization departments is to ensure the game ships simultaneously in every language that God cursed Babylon with. The consequence for failure being that the 'gray' market of US versions of the game will cut into the localized version's sales and upset foreign software distributors – an impossible goal, but you may not know why.

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Left: Home-grown games companies like CDV plan to challenge foreign publishers in the German market

Quote

The goal of localization departments is to ensure the game ships simultaneously in every language God cursed Babylon with

Unquote

Basically, most of the scripts and recordings don't completely crystallize until near the end of a project. That's because these are huge undertakings and, often, during development, script changes abound and audio 'pick up' recording sessions are necessary. By the time there is a complete set of asset files to go to the good old UK (where the best translations have always been done), there is little time to get everything right, in place, and checked by QA (Quality Assurance, the play-testers) before the US version is ready.

Logically, one would think that the US company would just wait a few weeks until everything was in place for all the Localized versions (or at least the major ones) and release them all simultaneously, right? Wrong. All too often, the publishers are deep in the hole, financially, on these projects, and they're really desperate to release any version the moment they can (bugs included).

While they need to start getting revenue back on the project, it really makes their books look better at the next stockholder's meeting when they can say "We shipped this game in the First Quarter."

Of course, they don't mention that it shipped on the last day of the First Quarter and didn't make it to a store shelf for another two weeks, or that only the US version shipped, not the other five languages that are still in the queue. But that's Big Business for you. PCSG.

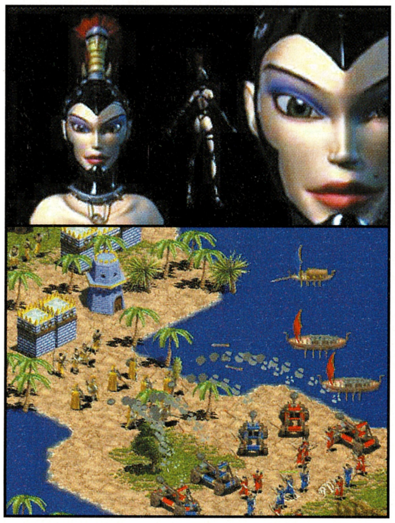
***Alan Emrich** is the former strategy games editor at Computer Gaming World magazine, and has designed a number of games. He is currently working for Quicksilver Software.*

Pretty in 'pink software'

***Kristen Bowditch** tells developers to look beyond the stereotypes*

I am a rare breed – if I were an animal I would have had a Wildlife on One programme devoted to me by now. I can almost hear David Attenborough's sotto voce commentary '...and there in the long grass, plainly recognisable by its weakness for angora, a female example of the genus 'Homo Computo'.

I would hope that this image is a bit of a give-away, and that by now the more astute readers will have realised that I am a woman – and one who spends a reasonable proportion of her spare time building up an evil empire of dungeon scum, trying to find a cure for bloaty head and amassing a small army of Tesla tanks for my war of attrition against the Allies. In a nutshell – I'm a woman and I like computer games. It all started with a text-based share dealing game borrowed from my local library and played on my brother's Sinclair Spectrum. Thus I was hooked.



But this apparently un-feminine interest has caused me several problems. Game developers know I exist, but have no real idea of the games I like or how to market them to me. Most computer magazines assume that they don't need to talk to me, as my brother/boyfriend/father will process the technical information and let me know the games I would like; and games retailers look at me like I took a wrong turn at Dorothy Perkins. And I don't think I'm alone out there.

Research into female gaming habits in America has revealed that teenage girls are turned off computers because most games are 'boring, violent and unrealistic'. They complain there is a real lack of female protagonists, and they have a point. Why are all the doctors in Theme Hospital male and the nurses female? Where are Cleopatra or Boudicca in Age of Empires?

But the problem isn't that there are no games out there for women, it's that games aren't marketed in the right way. Many women enjoy Command & Conquer, Caesar, Dungeon Keeper and even the more overtly militaristic war games, but feel marginalised because they are seen as aberrations. You see, developers have read somewhere that girls are problem solvers, and that they only like Sim-City and Theme Park World. Keeping an array of sim-citizens happy obviously appeals to our maternal instincts, they deduce. Equally, they believe that a boy's idea of solving a problem is a clean head shot. They think boys like competitive, violent, fast, repetitive action, and girls like co-operation, emotion, and story-telling. Ahh...that would be the 'frogs and snails and puppy dogs tails' defence, then – and it doesn't wash with me.

Maybe I'm going out on a limb here, but I just don't think it's that cut and dried. It's not surprising that girls are turned off computer games. It seems simple to me. Don't make some computer games a men-only club. If you market them right, we will play them.

Then there's 'pink software' — games specifically designed for girls. This covers such diverse entertainments as Barbie Fashion Designer, Barbie Gottagroove and Barbie Race and Ride.

Her Interactive, a girl's game developer, launched a game a couple of years ago called McKenzie and Company – an interactive role-playing program set in a typical American High School, the aim being to secure a invitation to the prom from your dream boy. Can you imagine anything more hideous than a prom date game? All those girls who don't conform to the American teen's idea of cool now face rejection by their cyber dates as well. Why create more gender stereotypes when there are great games out there already, like Dungeon Keeper, Command and Conquer, Warcraft and the ilk, that girls could 'graduate' to?

Quote

> **You see, developers have read somewhere that girls are problem solvers, and that they only like Sim-City and Theme Park World**

Unquote

Left: DKII has a strong female role model; why doesn't AoEII? **Below:** Theme Hospital's doctors and nurses annoy

'Pink software' may cater for nine to 15-year-olds; but if you take it to its natural conclusion what will we have for the older female gamer? A wash-day sim, perchance? Hours of soapy fun with Percy Persil and his stain-busting friends, only £29.99 with free Ironing for John expansion pack? Thank god for Settlers III Quest of the Amazons.

It's not that girls have a narrow band of interests that are at odds with technology, it's that developers think we have. Most of us just want to play games.

Nothing sums this up better than an anecdote from the 1997 Game Developers Conference in California which hosted a seminar entitled 'What do female game players really want'? After 30 minutes of heated debate between the panel members about what women wanted from the computer games market, a game developer stood up, slammed her fists down on the table and repeated the straightforward sentiment of an eighth-grade girl: "I will like it – if it's good."

*Kristen Bowditch **is a business journalist covering the pharmaceutical industry and is also a part time play-tester for computer games company Eidos.***

All that he wants... is more fun

***Mike Siggins** explores the touchy subject of games that don't let players complete them – how long can our egos take this battering?*

Above: **Egypt. Land of the Pharaohs...**

Below: **...full of beautiful cities which hopefully have better fire precautions than those in its predecessor, Caesar**

Permit me a restrained, and brief, rant. The subject is that minority of computer games that you just can't access in full. There are many reasons for this, but the result is the same – I pay out thirty quid in good faith, and find I can only play a fraction of the product. This reduces what I've bought to a part game or an expensive demo; a real knock to my value for money - value-subtracted, to twist a current buzzword. In quiet moments, I wonder what the Trading Standards people would say. Hard to imagine tolerating a video recorder that won't play the end of movies. But that is how I feel when confronted with near impossible levels (even in so-called strategy games) completion of which is essential to proceed further. If you fail, you have a CD that is fit only to be a coaster.

Immediately, I think of Warcraft II. I would have dearly loved to have completed that one, but I got firmly stuck on level four or five when the designer decided to get all puzzle-y on me. I don't want to have to work out timing patterns in a real-time wargame. It's hard enough keeping up with the AI or my nimble fingered nephew. Even my favourite game of all time, Syndicate, had this failing. Syndicate, however, avoids severe castigation because it was only the infamous last level that seemed impossible. Of course American Revolt and Syndicate Wars were way too difficult, and died on the vine. Ditto Commandos (which fact seems to have escaped almost everyone at Eidos). Who playtests these games? No normal human beings, I suggest, but instead large eyed mutants with genetically modified fingers.

Ultimately this leads us to that old evolutionary divide – are you a real-time aficionado, or a dyed-in-the-wool turn based fan? I don't mind either form, but it strikes me that the chaos afforded by RTS is over-compensated by the need for frantic action, usually precluding much in the way of strategic thought. The hands are blurred, the mind soon follows. But you can't shun the genre, because that would mean no Age of Empires which, Civilization apart, must have had the best extended playability for years.

But this is a sports column, so let's look at the main culprits. No game was anticipated as much as Grand Prix Legends – the chance to drive a 1960's F1 car was trouser-wetting stuff. It would be nice if I had been able to actually complete a full lap then. Good sound effects though. In fact, racing games are a poor bunch generally. V-Rally, Colin McRae and TOCA are all painfully difficult – ever tried winning? I guess I have seen no more than 10% of these three.

In the middle ground is the sublime Gran Turismo, which is undoubtedly well balanced. Okay, I hate the driving tests, but one can eventually get to the top sports cars (and race them against Nissan Micras for revenge). On the plus side, Le Mans is pretty good and Grand Prix/World Circuit is equitable as well as brilliant. But what I want – no, I demand – is the ability to drive the GT1 Toyota which I know is on the disk somewhere, rather than being forced into a Ford Ka. And I want to drive it on the track I choose. Is that so much to ask?

Other games have what I call the Frustration Factor. A good example, but still one of my all time favourite games, is Caesar III. Quite what one had to do to prevent fires breaking out all over, I don't know. It got to the point where my enjoyment was spoilt, however soothing the evocative music, and the game shelved prematurely. I am hoping that the even more beautiful Pharaoh is rather less prone to conflagration. This really is a shame, when even SimCity let you turn off the disasters.

So how can all this be solved? On the PlayStation, and often the PC, we are regularly advised of cheat codes and even provided with entire walkthrough solutions. The same is available free on the web for most games, in time. The alternative is to shell out even more money for one of those wretched strategy books. I have two on my shelf at present. The one for Myst was essential, because I defy anyone to come up with less logical puzzles. The other shall remain nameless, but is soon to become a firelighter. I can't believe I am alone in not wishing to buy these expensive volumes. So, politely, I request an adult, circumspect method of weakening opponents, improving tyre grip or just skipping entire levels. A way to creep behind Oz's curtain and pull some switches, if you prefer. PCSG.

***Mike Siggins** has been playing games for 25 years and writing about them for 15.*
He is a consultant in the fields of corporate treasury, motorsport and the Internet.
He also heads Aethereal Design, currently developing several boardgame titles and a PC simulation for a major publisher.
His views are very much his own.

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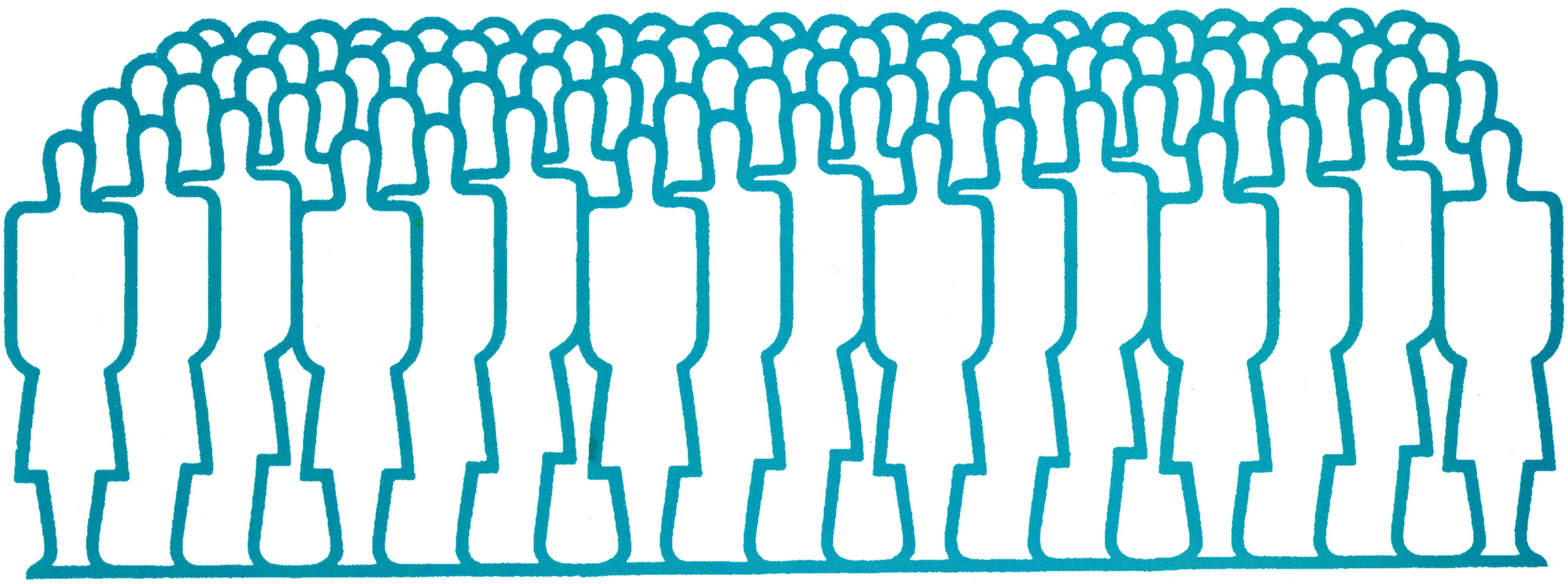
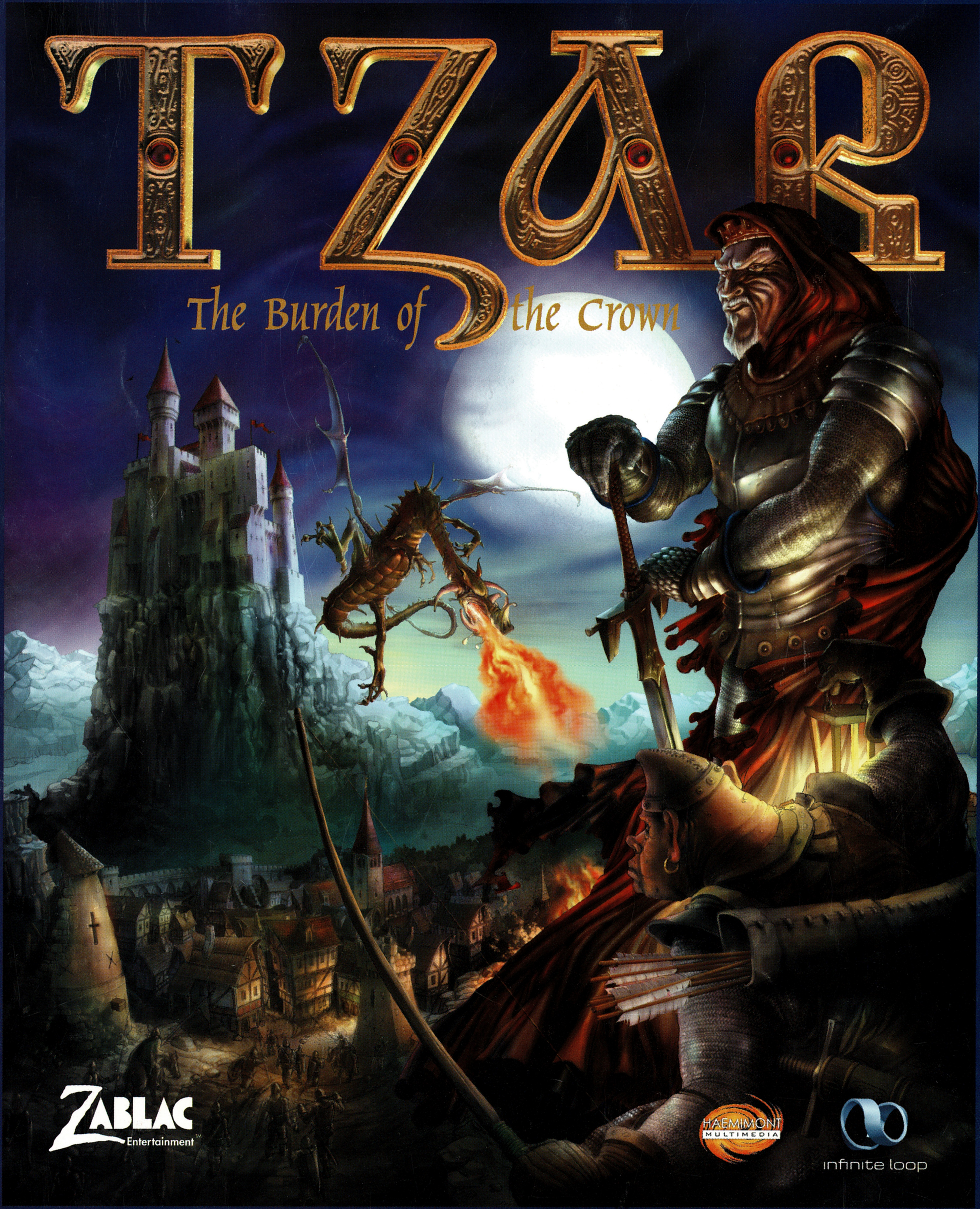


"Decent magic system and different looking units makes it better than Age of Empire II". PC Strategy Games.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